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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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TAX-REFORM BOTCH

To the editors:

Your Notebook item "Tax-Reform Watch" (July 15&22) shows little understanding of permanent life insurance or of the administration's proposal to tax it.

First of all, permanent insurance is not a savings account; it is a contract to provide a death benefit. The distinctive feature of such insurance is that the premiums remain level for life, permitting continued protection regardless of age. The basic purpose of the funds that do accumulate under the contract is to enable the premiums to remain level.

You suggest people buy term insurance, but those premiums rise each year, becoming prohibitive in later life just when most people are approaching the point where a death benefit will inevitably be paid. Term insurance may account for 20 percent of individual life insurance premiums, but it pays out only ten percent of the death benefits.

The administration's proposal would tax just permanent life insurance. Worse yet, the tax would increase as the insured gets older. In many cases the taxes paid on a policy by a 60-year-old policyholder would be greater than the annual premium. Not only would that motivate many to drop their protection, it would constitute the first age-indexed tax in history!

RICHARD S. SCHWEIKER
American Council of Life Insurance
Washington, D.C.

GUATEMALA'S HUMAN RIGHTS

To the editors:

In his article "The Guatemalan Silence" (June 10) Piero Gleijeses fails to mention important events that have taken place in Guatemala in the last three years. The country is moving away from its extremist-stimulated violent ways in all areas, including human rights, since the publication of the 1981 Amnesty International Report quoted by the author.

Last November Lord Colville de Culross of the United Nations Human Rights Commission issued a report recognizing that there has been considerable progress in Guatemala in "creating conditions in which the electoral process can be pursued in a climate free from intimidation and terror." In March of this year the commission passed a resolution that called Guatemala's elections of July 1984 "the first stage of the process for the return of democracy and the institution of a new constitutional government." The resolution also praised the Guatemalan government's "invitation to political exiles to return to Guatemala" and participate in the elections "with guarantees of full and open participation." And the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International, by official invitation, have visited Guatemala this year to assess the situation in situ.

The text of Guatemala's new constitution calls for presidential, congressional, and municipal elections to be held on November 3, 1985. Today there is a very dynamic and lively political debate with more than ten political parties freely competing in the elections, including the Social Democratic Party (PSD), whose leaders were not long ago in self-imposed ex-

continued on page 41

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2 **CORRESPONDENCE** ..... On Guatemalan redress, ethnic success, &c.

4 **TRB FROM WASHINGTON** ..... HOW TO GYP THE JAPS
Who's afraid of "mercantilism"?

5 **THE EDITORS** ..... MILK FOR BABIES
America's infant mortality crisis.
NOTEBOOK

6 **ERIC BREINDEL** ..... THE PRICE OF HELSINKI
We bluster and dissidents suffer—all for the sake of a sham agreement.

7 **MICHAEL HIRSCHORN** ..... NIXON'S PAPER CHASE
He might yet profit from Watergate.

10 **FRED BARNES** ..... WILDER CARD
A black politician gently rocks the cradle of the Confederacy.

12 **HENRY FAIRLIE** ..... THE PRESS: BAN THE BOMBAST
Too much ado about Hiroshima.

14 **JAMES ROSENTHAL** ..... HERITAGE HYPE
The hottest think tank in Washington.

16 **CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER** ..... WHAT TO DO ABOUT 'BABY DOE'
When should an infant with severe birth defects be allowed to die?

21 **ABIGAIL THERNSTROM** ..... 'VOTING RIGHTS' TRAP
Civil rights groups risk resegregating black voters by making the number of blacks in office the sole measure of minority representation.

24 **STANLEY KAUFFMANN** ..... ON FILMS: TELLING TITLES
Kiss of the Spider Woman sinks; *Péril* glides.

25 **ANN HULBERT** ..... RURAL CHIC
America's romance with life on the land thrives in films and fiction.

30 **ROBERT TOWERS** ..... TALK SHOW
Carpenter's Gothic by William Gaddis

32 **ERNEST GELLNER** ..... THE BOURGEOIS MARX
Understanding Marx by Robert Paul Wolff
Against Fragmentation by Alvin W. Gouldner
Making Sense of Marx by Jon Elster

36 **GORDON A. CRAIG** ..... ANGSTPOLITIK
Germany Today by Walter Laqueur

38 **CLARENCE BROWN** ..... POSTMARK PARNASSUS
Letters, Summer 1926: Pasternak, Tsvetayeva, Rilke

40 **JAMES J. CRAMER** ..... THE WIZ
Merger Mania by Ivan F. Boesky

43 **WASHINGTON DIARIST** ..... GOD AND COUNTRY

COVER by Bryan Leister for THE NEW REPUBLIC. Article on page 25.

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FROM WASHINGTON

How To Gyp The Japs

In all of social science, the one law that comes closest to being "scientific" in the sense of having perfect predictive value is the economic doctrine of free trade. The general case for free markets is full of complications and qualifications. But not so international trade. A nation *always* benefits economically from allowing its citizens to purchase foreign goods without restrictions, and this is true whether foreign nations reciprocate or not. Economists are in rare unanimity, except for a few cranks and hired guns. The legitimate exceptions to this law are barely worth mentioning and almost never arise in real life.

Yet no one believes it. Oh, columnists and editorial writers usually put free trade right up there with teenage sobriety and support for the arts as deities worthy of regular genuflection. But that's only because commentators don't face South Korean competitors manufacturing high-minded opinions by the yard using dollar-an-hour coolie labor. If they did, they'd soon change their tune. So pending that ominous development, this is a good moment to restate the holy writ.

Our current trade problems (leading to a deficit this year of more than $150 billion) have been blamed on four factors. The emphasis depends on who's doing the blaming. First, the overvalued dollar, which makes imports a bargain and exports a trial. Second, tough but legitimate foreign competition. Third, cheap foreign labor. And fourth, outright cheating: trade barriers and export subsidies by foreign governments.

Most people recognize that the first two factors are not good reasons for protectionism. The overvalued dollar is our own fault, of course, caused by massive government borrowing, and its value has been declining lately anyway. Protectionism against legitimate foreign competition is a recipe for international trade paralysis, which would harm the U.S. as much as anyone. Some industries beg for "temporary relief," arguing they need time to adjust. But one taste of this drug invariably turns them into addicts, as the auto and steel industries have demonstrated.

So the trouble boils down to coolies and cheating. It's feared that cheap foreign workers will drag us down to their level. But a nation can't get richer by excluding the products of cheap labor. And it can't get poorer by letting them in. Quite the opposite. When an American does a job that some foreigner is willing to do for a dollar, he's only adding a dollar of value to the economy. That's true no matter what he actually gets paid. If it's $15 an hour, he's imposing a $14 tax on other Americans. If he's a steelworker or an auto worker, most of those other Americans are poorer than he is. The easiest way to grasp the fallacy here is to imagine that we shut our borders to all foreign goods and services and started paying ourselves $1,000 an hour. Would we all be rich?

Now, cheating. Let us suppose the worst of the Japanese. Let's suppose they're so determined to sell more than they buy that they purposely underprice their own goods and pull every trick in the book to keep our goods out. Or (another popular xenophobic fantasy), let's suppose that they're genetically programmed to work like beavers 60 hours a week and never spend any money. Is that unfair to us? Should we crack down?

It's hard to see why. What Japan's $40 billion annual trade surplus with the U.S. means is that they are supplying us $40 billion more of goods and services this year than we are supplying them. What's so devious about that? In return they get . . . dollars. All that dollars are good for—ultimately—is to buy goods and services from America. So there are only two things the Japanese can do with their dollar surpluses. They can hoard the dollars, in which case there is no problem. Or they can spend the dollars, in which case the problem is solved.

Senator Lloyd Bentsen, author of a major protectionist bill, says we need "an aggressive trade strategy . . . to

continued on page 42

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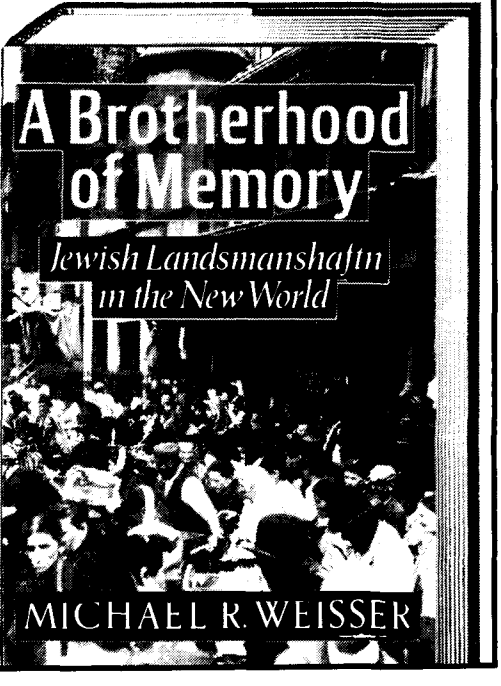

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THE NEW REPUBLIC
SEPTEMBER 2, 1985

MILK FOR BABIES

"There is no finer investment for any community than putting milk into babies," Winston Churchill once observed. The remark, uncontroversial almost to the point of fatuousness, is not likely to draw many denials. But it might be well heeded in today's White House, where healthy babies fall low on the scale of priorities. During the recent recession, while the number of children in poverty was soaring, funding for child health services was being sharply cut. Everything from milk to polio vaccine has been threatened. In a few cases seriously sick infants have been turned away from hospitals whose annual Medicaid funds had run out. Though Congress restored some funding in 1984, the effects of the cuts linger.

Particularly worrisome are recent trends in infant mortality. From 1965 to 1982, the rate of infant deaths dropped steadily by about five percent a year. In 1983 the pace of decline dropped by half, arousing anxiety among public health officials. With an infant mortality rate of 10.6 deaths per thousand births, the United States has slipped from seventh place in the world in 1954 to 17th. Japan, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand all have shot ahead, despite American preeminence in medical technology.

The problem strikes hardest, not surprisingly, in America's poorest communities. White infant mortality is most prevalent in the Appalachian and Midwestern industrial areas and in some Southern states. All 27 states with sizable black populations have high black infant death rates. In the District of Columbia last year the infant mortality rate rose by an astonishing 16.5 percent, to 20 deaths per thousand births.

Although it's hard to isolate the causes of the slowdown in the decline of the infant mortality rate, there is no doubt that the mothers most at risk have suffered from the Reagan cutbacks in federal health programs. In 1982 eligibility for Aid to Families with Dependent Children was restricted so that 700,000 fewer children were covered. This reduced spending by one billion dollars. Community Health Centers lost $40 million, and the Maternal and Child Health program was cut by $38 million. The eligibility requirements for Medicaid were also tightened. The number of children in poverty has grown by three million over the past four years, yet in 1983, 366,000 fewer children received Medicaid. And the 1986 congressional budget compromise calls for further savings over the next three years of $450 million in Medicaid and no increases in discretionary health programs, many of which serve mothers and children.

Nevertheless, the dismaying statistics can't simply be attributed to pecuniary irresponsibility on the part of the federal government. Long-standing and seemingly intractable social ills are at work here too. Women who smoke, abuse drugs, or drink excessively are all at high risk. And the black community is particularly susceptible. Today 21.5 percent of all black children in this country are born to teenage unwed mothers. These girls are especially prone to giving birth to underweight babies, are the most uninformed about infant care, and are the least likely to take advantage of whatever health services are available. Black babies are almost twice as likely as white infants to die before they reach their first birthday. And the gap may even be widening. In 1983 the black infant death rate increased for the first time in ten years. Black babies are today twice as likely as whites to be born prematurely, three times as likely to lose their mothers in childbirth, four times as likely to be murdered in their first year, and, to complete the happy cycle, five times as likely themselves to become pregnant as teenagers.

Most sensible people agree that America's health system could stand some rigorous improvements. The area of maternal care and maternity benefits is no exception. In 1982 one out of five white mothers and one out of three black mothers did not see a doctor at all in the first three months of pregnancy. Providing medical care, nutritional services, and counseling to needy pregnant women, according to the Children's Defense Fund, could save at least 2,700 lives over the next five years. And a study by Sheila B. Kamerman of Columbia University found that the United States was the only one of 75 countries surveyed without a law ensuring basic health and social supports for pregnant working women.

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The question is how best to improve the system. Representative Henry Waxman, chairman of the House Health and Environment Subcommittee, puts much of the blame for today's sorry statistics on the administration's social Darwinism: "The Reagan administration does not believe in assisting people who cannot take care of themselves." Dr. James Mason, acting assistant secretary of health, says that "those people who say that this is just an issue of funding—that is so simplistic! By golly, it would make me so happy if I thought all I had to do was to ask Congress for more money." Mason believes that in fact prenatal care *is* widely available and that pregnant women are not making use of it. "There is an apathy factor, a lack of understanding." He doubts that federal efforts will achieve much until a commitment to tackle the problem is made at the *community level.*

Mason may be right about the "lack of understanding" among many girls and women about proper prenatal care, and about the importance of community initiatives, but the evidence does not bear out his faith in the availability of health services. Three out of every four women and children eligible for WIC, a program of nutritional support, cannot get benefits because there is not enough funding. Around the country, lower reimbursement rates have resulted in shortages of doctors willing to serve pregnant women on Medicaid. Last year in prosperous Suffolk County, New York, several hundred Medicaid recipients gave birth with little or no prenatal care because no obstetrician would agree to treat them. "In some areas," asserts C. Arden Miller of the University of North Carolina, "there are two-month waiting lists for poor women to get into clinics. It's not as if the doors are standing open waiting for people to walk through."

Federal support for providing and publicizing prenatal care makes sense on budgetary, as well as humanitarian, grounds. It costs far less to ensure that a baby is born healthy than to keep it alive just one day in intensive care, let alone to provide a retarded or crippled infant lifelong support. A recent study by the National Institute of Medicine, "Preventing Low Birthweight," found that every dollar spent on prenatal care actually saves over three dollars in medical expenses treating underweight newborns. The result of providing prenatal care for all low-income women, according to another study, would be a saving of $360 million per year. Other countries have begun to discover the advantages of shrewd preventive medicine. In France small cash payments are offered as incentives to women who undertake a full program of prenatal care. The scheme has been very successful in reducing infant mortality in poor Algerian immigrant communities.

It is increasingly clear that technological expertise no longer assures the U.S. a high place on the health statistics charts. Reducing infant mortality will depend in coming years less on technological intervention and more on social and medical prevention. The Reagan administration professes a profound concern for the rights of unborn babies, but has done little to safeguard their health, and has made perfectly clear its opposition to family planning. Congress is also to blame, with its short-term perspective that budget politics breeds. No one can refuse to treat a patient who walks into a hospital emergency room, so when it comes time to balance the budget, preventive medicine is all that's left. The trick is to convince policymakers that vitamins—and education in the rudiments of health care—are a sound investment. Churchill could do it. Can we?

NOTEBOOK

□ NEWSPEAK CORNER:

Martinez . . . told journalists Tuesday that he had been marched off with some 12 other captives, all Sandinista militiamen and officials, as the rebels withdrew from the town about three hours after entering it.

"Then I was marched off in one direction and everyone else in the other direction," said Martinez. "A few minutes later I heard some shots and I figured they had killed them."

Local authorities said they found the bodies of 11 Sandinistas thrown into a gorge near the town the next day. They said one woman Sandinista was still missing.

The Washington Post, August 8

Rebels fighting to overthrow the Nicaraguan Government have been receiving direct military advice from White House officials. . . . The operation has been run by a military officer who is a member of the National Security Council. . . .

White House officials . . . are planning to set up a new agency associated with the State Department to administer the $27 million in renewed, nonmilitary aid to the rebels that Congress approved last week. [They said] the new office would be called the Agency for Humanitarian Assistance.

The New York Times, same day

Why we should renounce the accords.

THE PRICE OF HELSINKI

NO ONE CONTENDS, on the tenth anniversary of the Helsinki Accords, that they have led to improvements in the state of human rights behind the Iron Curtain. In fact, virtually all groups in the West that monitor international human rights agree that abuses have gotten considerably worse in the Soviet Union and in the East bloc over the last decade.

The notion that the accords have actually had a harmful effect seems farfetched. Yet, ironically, they did create a new, discrete class for Soviet authorities to persecute: members of the Helsinki Watch groups. Of the original Soviet group of would-be monitors, more than half are today incarcerated—in prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and the camps of the Gulag. A number of other monitors have died due to maltreatment in prison, or under mysterious circumstances. Of the rest, some are at large in the Soviet

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Union, having been freed from incarceration. Others are in the West—in forced exile. The work of the Soviet Helsinki Watch, the entire internal effort to monitor compliance with the human rights provisions of the accords, has ceased altogether.

HELSINKI represents the clearest possible case of an agreement with which one side complied while the other did not; a pact from which one side got what it wanted while the other did not. (Helsinki, it should be noted, is not, technically, a treaty. If it were, it would arguably have lapsed automatically by now, due to noncompliance.) The Soviet Union was extremely anxious for the security provisions of Helsinki—Basket I of the Final Act—understanding them, as does the entire world, as representing formal acknowledgment of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe and the Baltic. Whether or not this formal recognition of the status quo is of any particular consequence is not the point. Moscow came to the negotiating table wanting this official recognition of the post-Second World War frontiers in Europe very badly—and got it.

The United States and its allies, in turn, pressed for Basket III—a commitment on the part of the Soviet Union and its allies to respect basic human rights and freedoms: among them, freedom of "thought, conscience, religion or belief"; freedom of access to information; the right to emigrate, particularly to achieve family reunification; and a host of other familiar "humanitarian" principles.

Given the virtually unanimous agreement that Moscow has failed to comply even minimally with its Helsinki obligations, why do so few people argue that the United States should repudiate the accords? The principal argument against nullification is that Helsinki affords the West the right, for the first time, to call the Soviets to account for human rights abuses, a preserve hitherto protected by the claim that such issues represent "internal matters." No longer, it is suggested, can Moscow rebuff Western human rights inquiries out of hand. And the accords provide for a regular forum—the review conferences in Belgrade, Madrid, Ottawa—in which to raise these concerns. These are forums that the Soviets and their satellites, it is said, dare not boycott.

Thus the purported virtue, for the West, of Helsinki: public diplomacy—a guaranteed opportunity to propagandize. This conception is both flawed in its premises and deeply disturbing. The truth is that the U.S. and the Soviet Union are already bound by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to uphold essentially the same principles identified in Basket III of Helsinki. And there is already an international forum, the U.N. Human Rights Commission, which meets annually to review compliance. There, in Geneva—as in Belgrade, Madrid, and Ottawa—charges and countercharges are traded. In addition, just two years before Helsinki the Soviet Union ratified the U.N. Human Rights Treaty.

The Helsinki Accords created something that was, in essence, already in existence. The advantages of this new forum, without the U.N.'s Soviet bloc-"non-aligned" automatic majority, are not to be discounted. Nor are the benefits of yet another arena in which to rail at the Soviets with the rest of the world, including the peoples of the East bloc and the USSR, looking on (thanks to Radio Free Europe, the BBC, and the Voice of America). But it remains a fact that these sessions have no effect whatever on Soviet domestic policy in the human rights theater. The last ten years are ample proof of that.

If there were no price to pay for these propaganda forums, it would make sense to wish for as many as possible. But in the case of Helsinki, the price is enormously steep. The United States—and its allies—entered into a solemn international agreement knowing that its adversary and cosignatory would not, *could* not, honor its terms. The Soviet Union would not be the Soviet Union if it permitted freedom of expression. The issue here is moral corruption. Should Washington, under any circumstance, be party to a sham agreement? What does this say about the United States's attitude toward international pacts in general? Are there some that are meant to be taken seriously, letter and spirit, and others simply not?

And what about America's commitment to the rights and freedoms enshrined in Basket III of Helsinki? Do we take freedom of religion seriously—or is it, as the Marxists contend, a "bourgeois freedom" and, as such, relative? The process of entry into a phony agreement is altogether treacherous. The United States is drawn into an Orwellian newspeak universe where things are not as they seem and people do not mean what they say. America adopts the Soviet view of international agreements and comes to acquiesce in a fraud.

The way out of this quagmire is clear. Those who are perhaps in the best position to determine the merits of Helsinki, the former Helsinki monitors now in the West, have made their view plain: repudiate the accords.

ERIC BREINDEL

Eric Breindel is a member of the editorial board of *The New York Daily News*.

How he might yet profit from Watergate.

NIXON'S PAPER CHASE

ELEVEN YEARS after he left the White House in disgrace, Richard Nixon finally may have figured out a way to profit from Watergate. In 1980 he filed a lawsuit against the U.S. government, demanding that it pay him for the estimated 42 million pages of Nixon presidential papers it holds at the National Archives. Because of some legal peculiarities relating to his own presidency and the scandal that ended it, he has a pretty good case.

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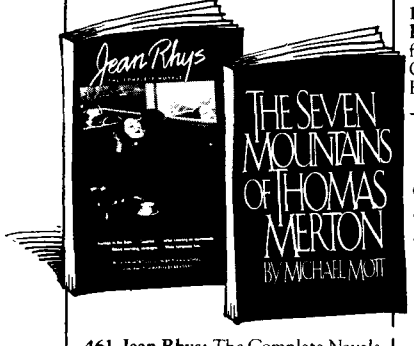

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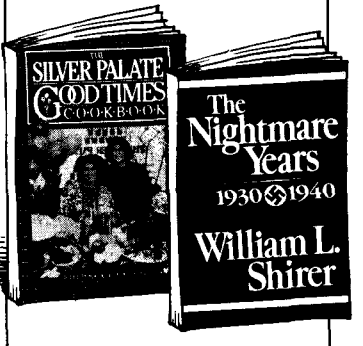

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The lawsuit, which has lain dormant for five years, is only now starting to move forward. Nixon's lawyers recently asked the court for summary judgment, although one of them, Stan Mortenson, estimates that the case, if it proceeds at its current pace, may not be decided until shortly before the end of the decade. If Nixon wins the suit, he could hit the jackpot. According to various estimates, the Nixon papers have a market value in the millions. One expert places the price as high as $40 million. That's a buck a page.

THROUGHOUT THE AGES, the legal status of presidential papers was unclear, but they were generally considered to be the personal property of the president, who usually donated them to the government or to a presidential library. In 1969, however, there was a huge fuss when Lyndon Johnson took a whopping tax deduction for the value of papers he donated to the LBJ Library. Congress passed a law specifically denying future presidents, starting with Nixon, a tax deduction for gifts of presidential materials. But the law didn't change the presumption that the presidential papers were a president's personal property.

(Forbidding a tax deduction for valuable presidential papers *isn't* unfair, because the donor never had to declare the increase in value as income. LBJ got to use his deduction to wipe out the tax on income that he didn't give away. Of course the same is true about all donations of so-called "appreciated property," but the 1969 law only applied to presidential papers. The 1984 Treasury tax-reform plan proposed closing this loophole, but this was one of the reforms President Reagan abandoned in his revised plan of last May.)

Enter Nixon. He missed the boat on his presidential papers, but while he was in the White House he took a $482,018 deduction for the gift of his *vice*-presidential papers. Unfortunately the IRS discovered in 1974, in a small part of the Watergate scandal, that Nixon had back-dated the document donating the papers. The date on the deed came before the 1969 law that outlawed the deduction. But in fact, Nixon had donated his papers in 1970, almost a year after the law made such deductions illegal.

Both Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter donated their presidential papers without claiming a tax deduction. Carter, in addition, signed legislation declaring that all presidential papers, starting with Reagan's, are the property of the government in the first place.

Nixon, luckily for him, is exempt from this change. And the reason, ironically enough, is Watergate. One month after his August 1974 resignation, Nixon signed an agreement with the Ford administration that allowed him to control both his presidential papers and the infamous Watergate tapes. When Congress got wind of this deal, it passed hasty legislation placing Nixon's presidential papers and tapes under federal custody. Since the question of ownership was unclear, the law provided that if a court later decided the materials were Nixon's "private property," then "just compensation . . . shall be paid out of the general fund of the Treasury of the United States."

Nixon is not indignantly asking for the return of his private property. They're staying put in the National Archives warehouse, where, barring new legislation or legal action, they will remain. Nixon just wants the money. His lawyers must first establish his right to compensation before the issue of price arises. The value of the materials is hard to determine, since they are unique. But Nixon could reasonably argue that his own history-making misdeeds make them very valuable indeed. "This is heavy constitutional stuff," historian, lawyer, and appraiser Bart Cox says of the Nixon archives. "You'd have to go back to Teapot Dome to get something comparable to this."

Mortenson says he is more likely to ask for no more than compensation for the cost Nixon has incurred and will incur (by paying Mortenson, among other expenses) protecting his rights to the papers and dealing with requests for access to them. The legal basis for his case, however, is not his costs, but the value of the papers and tapes. Mortenson would not set a price on 11 years of past legal services and the projected cost of all future legal services, but insisted that Nixon "has no interest personally in recovering the large fee," and says the ex-president would probably give any extra money to the Nixon Library.

MICHAEL HIRSCHORN

Virginia's surprising contender.

WILDER CARD

Richmond

WITH ONE EXCEPTION, Douglas Wilder might pass for a run-of-the-mill candidate for statewide office in Virginia. He supports the state's right-to-work law, backs the death penalty, favors a balanced budget (even a constitutional amendment mandating a balanced federal budget), and opposes collective bargaining for state employees. On occasion, Wilder also echoes the fiscal stinginess that is a hallowed Virginia tradition. He is a Democrat, but he squawked loudly when popular Democratic governor Charles Robb proposed to buy a new airplane to travel the state. "There was nothing wrong with the old one," says Wilder.

A moderate-to-conservative Democrat in the mold of Senator Harry F. Byrd? Not quite. Wilder would not have been welcome in the party in Byrd's day, and some Democratic leaders are none too pleased to have him as the party's nominee for lieutenant governor this year. The reason? Wilder is black. He was the first black to gain a seat in the state Senate (in 1969) and the first to have statewide political clout in Virginia (that came as a result of Robb's victory in 1981). Now he is the first black in modern times to be nominated for top state office

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by the Democratic Party in any Southern state.

Wilder, more than any black politician in the South, has mastered the art of using the black voting bloc as leverage. Many black politicians have achieved local or regional power, but little more. Mayor Andrew Young has a tight hold on Atlanta, but his chances of winning nomination to statewide office are poor. Mayor Ernest Morial of New Orleans has the same problem. And both are from states where the black percentage of the population—Georgia, 24.3 percent; Louisiana, 26.6 percent—is greater than that of Virginia (17.5 percent). A black, Cecil Williams, narrowly lost the Democratic Senate nomination in South Carolina in 1984. And a black, Asa Spaulding Jr., was the Republican nominee for secretary of state in North Carolina in 1976. He lost overwhelmingly in the general election.

That won't happen to Wilder, a 54-year-old Richmond attorney. His prospects of defeating Republican John Chichester are not great, but he's likely to draw considerably more than 40 percent of the vote. And were he to fool everyone and win the lieutenant governorship, he would automatically become a credible candidate for the Senate in 1988, when Republican Paul Trible is up for reelection, or for governor in 1989. In fact, he may be a serious contender in those races even if he loses respectably this year.

Dreams of black political power aside, Virginia is still a very conservative state. That hardly makes it fertile turf for Wilder. Despite some conservative stands, he is moderate-to-liberal by Virginia standards. He has been sharply critical of President Reagan, who is enormously popular in the state. And the issues he is stressing are not conservative fare: more spending for schools and highways, higher teacher salaries, alternatives to prison for nonviolent offenders. Yet he already has made his mark in the campaign, first by scaring off any opponents for the Democratic nomination, then by forcing Wyatt Durrette, the Republican candidate for governor, to cease attacking him.

WILDER WAS THE FIRST to jump into the race, and he dared anyone to challenge him. Some Democratic leaders warned privately that he couldn't win in the fall and that he would hurt the entire Democratic ticket. "They were desperate to find someone else," says Larry Sabato, a University of Virginia professor and an authority on Virginia politics. But this was offset by the fear that Wilder might bolt the party if he lost the nomination. "Wilder is one of the few figures in the black community who can deny a substantial portion of the black vote to a Democratic candidate," adds Sabato. And without black support, a Democrat cannot win statewide in Virginia. Only one Democrat has won a presidential, senatorial, or gubernatorial race in Virginia since 1966—Robb—and he did it while getting only 46 percent of the white vote. Wilder's ardent backing was crucial to Robb's successful wooing of black voters.

Wilder said he never thought about bolting. "I made it clear throughout that I would run as a Democrat and only as a Democrat," he says. Still, party leaders were queasy, remembering his threat to run as an independent for the Senate in 1982. At one point an effort to draft Richard Bagley, a prominent state legislator, to challenge Wilder flared. But Bagley, a dropout from the governor's race, wasn't interested, and the movement fizzled. In the end, Wilder was unopposed. "We ended up with more pledged delegates than anyone else in either party," Wilder says.

Initially Republicans were delighted to have Wilder on the Democratic slate. Durrette, at a press conference, labeled him "the most liberal person ever to run" in Virginia. This was something of an exaggeration, since Henry Howell, a liberal populist, was the Democratic nominee for governor in 1973 and 1977. In any case, Wilder responded with a list of 49 issues on which he and Durrette had agreed when the two were legislators together. Durrette also said Wilder and Mary Sue Terry, who is running for attorney general, were "controversial running mates" for Gerald Baliles, the Democratic candidate for governor. Was Wilder controversial because he is black, Terry because she's a woman? Durrette saw what he was getting into and dropped the subject. Now he rarely mentions Wilder.

Durrette should have known better in the first place. Politicians who have tangled with Wilder in recent years have not prospered, and the figure with whom Wilder is most closely associated—Robb—rivals Reagan in popularity in Virginia. It wasn't always quite this way. Wilder began his political career as a gadfly. He upset many Virginians in 1971 by trying to repeal the state song, "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny," because it has references to "darkies." In 1980 he shrewdly guided a bill to create a state holiday honoring Martin Luther King Jr. through the state Senate by tagging King's name to Lee-Jackson Day. When protests arose, Wilder gladly offered to have a separate day set aside to honor King, which is what he had wanted all along. The King bill passed.

Once Robb became governor, Wilder attained unprecedented influence for a black in the state. He was instrumental in naming hundreds of blacks to state posts, including a Supreme Court justice, a cabinet secretary, a majority on the parole board, and the head of the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board. In 1982 Wilder rebelled against Robb's personal selection of Owen Pickett, an obscure state delegate, as the Democratic Senate candidate. Pickett had gotten on the wrong side of Wilder by talking favorably of Senator Harry Byrd, the symbol to blacks of years of segregation and "massive resistance" to racially mixed schools. If Pickett were the nominee, Wilder said he would run as an independent, thereby all but assuring victory for Republican Paul Trible. Pickett managed to line up enough delegates to win the nomination, but at Robb's urging he pulled out of the race. Wilder, after altering the course of the Democratic Party, abandoned plans to run as an independent.

A FEW DAYS before Pickett's demise, Wilder provoked another incident that drew attention. Two Democrats invited him to lunch to dissuade him from running, and he asked to go to the all-white, all-male Commonwealth Club, a bastion of the state's financial establishment. One of his hosts, Alson Smith, the chair-

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man of the House Democratic Caucus, balked. "I'm not going to take you-all in there," he told Wilder. Wilder made sure the incident became public knowledge, embarrassing Smith and other Democratic honchos.

That was the old Doug Wilder, an outspoken fellow who denounced the "magnolia mentality" of Virginia's political leadership. But a new, mellower Wilder is running for lieutenant governor. Now he plays down racial issues. "I have asked no person to vote for me or against me because of race," he says. Wilder has no plans to bring national black leaders to Virginia to stump for him. He is attempting to represent all of Virginia, not simply his Richmond district, he says. Uncoded, this means he is seeking white votes. "There is no way I could be representative [of the entire state] unless I subdued my passion," Wilder says. "I've tried to do that."

One way he's done it is by praising Virginia to the hilt, an appeal to state chauvinism. "Virginia is not, nor has it been, so hidebound that it won't make changes for progress," he says. "If a black can be elected statewide anywhere, it can happen in Virginia." Surprisingly, Ed DeBolt, the top Republican strategist in the state, agrees. "Wilder's got 40-plus percent right now," DeBolt says. "If Chichester dogged it or stumbled or was baited into mistaken references, sure, Wilder has a chance." That is no small achievement by itself.

FRED BARNES

THE PRESS

BAN THE BOMBAST

FOR A MONTH the press wallowed in the 40th anniversary of Hiroshima. The leaders of the pack were the newsmagazines: 23 pages in *Newsweek*, 25 in *Time*. The second was a Herculean labor of reporting and writing by *Time*'s senior writer Roger Rosenblatt. But in general, I think the press made too much of a bad thing.

As I read the endless descriptions of the dropping of the bomb, the reflections, the laments, the breast-beating, the mea culpas, I began to feel paralyzed. Or, rather, I began to feel that any confident assertion of American power must be paralyzed if the bomb is seen in this way: that such an assertion in "the atomic age" must be futile or too dangerous or immoral, and probably all three. There was almost no discussion of the most important consequence of the bomb: the development of the theory and strategy of deterrence. The implicit message was that, given the burden of American guilt in dropping the bomb, and given the frightfulness of the weapon, we should all join the nuclear freeze movement and wind ribbons round the Pentagon. This may not have been the intention of the journalistic overkill, megawords for megadeaths. It was the effect.

Some commentators did point out that the only available alternative on August 6, 1945, was a conventional invasion of Japan, and the continued heavy (conventional) bombing of its cities. A conservative estimate is that such an invasion would have cost the lives of *at least* 500,000 GIs, and God alone knows how many Japanese soldiers and civilians. But no one noted that this would not have been the only cost. As the American armies were slaughtered by suicidal opposition, Truman would have had no choice but to take American (and British) forces out of Europe, when the Russian divisions were massed from the Baltic to the Black seas. The Soviet Union would have overrun Western Europe. It would not have been deterred by a threat to use the bomb, since Truman already would have refused to use it against Japan. *That* would have been a catastrophe. *Then* there would have been cause for guilt.

SO HOW DID the press cover the anniversary? There was a lot about the victims and survivors in Hiroshima. It is right that we should be reminded of the horror, yet something in the coverage made me restless. In his poem "A refusal to mourn the death, by fire, of a child in London," written during the Blitz, Dylan Thomas began with the rightly famous line: "After the first death, there is no other." The man who wrote that was not only feeling accurately (and deeply), he was thinking and so making us feel more accurately. The interviews with the survivors did not make me think or feel anything very deep. What is more, it is wrong to allow the awfulness of the suffering in Hiroshima to erase or diminish the no less great suffering inflicted on others by conventional weapons. Apart from the implication for the future, the bombing of Hiroshima was no more terrible than the bombing of Dresden or Coventry—or, for that matter, shooting someone with a bow and arrow at Agincourt. No new human savagery was revealed when the bomb was dropped; the first day of the Battle of the Somme was just as frightful (perhaps worse).

In the introduction to her volume of essays *Towards A Radical Middle* (1969), Renata Adler said that we seemed to have reached the stage where we could discuss human problems only at the level of atrocity. When everything becomes an atrocity, there soon ceases to be any atrocity. Our sense of outrage, so easily aroused, as on a "Today Show," in fact is blunted. The Holocaust was an atrocity. The dropping of the bomb cannot be compared to it. There was nothing atrocious in the motives (it was meant to save lives, and it did), and nothing particularly atrocious (except "After the first death . . .") about its consequences.

Whether or not Russia was deterred by America's possession of the bomb after 1945, some writers in the past few weeks have said that Truman thought that dropping it on Japan might be a warning to Russia. If Truman did in fact think that (and the evidence is slight), it is certainly an uncomfortable reason, but it would have been no more than a consideration of statecraft. Power has its reasons. If one is not prepared to face that fact, unpleasant as it is, one should not comment on power.

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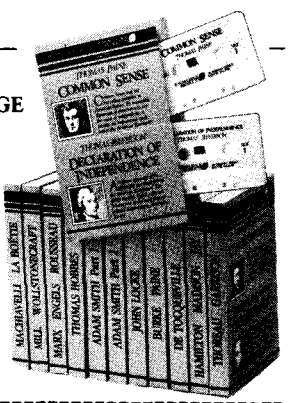

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But very little of the coverage of the Hiroshima anniversary was framed in terms of statecraft. America dropped the bomb—and what happened then? This question was not asked. Just as a consideration of the alternative to the bomb lifts some of the load of guilt from America, so does a consideration of how America behaved once it had dropped the bomb. For several years America alone (in partnership with Britain) possessed the bomb. During that time America acted with unparalleled maturity, assurance, magnanimity, and (more often than not) even wisdom.

Bertrand Russell in his last years became the most distinguished spokesman of the unilateral nuclear disarmament movement in Britain. The old earl sat on sidewalks as agilely as any student. But earlier, when America alone had the bomb, he not only thought that was an ideal situation, promising peace "forever," he even (amazingly, given his later views) urged America to make a preemptive nuclear strike against Russia. This may seem utterly crazy now, but while America remained in sole possession of the bomb, there in fact seemed to be the quite fair prospect of the world existing (perhaps "forever") under a relatively benign *pax Americana*. This was a tribute to American restraint during that period, and that restraint is an essential part of the story of the bomb.

SO WITH Hiroshima we "entered the atomic age." Yes, we did, bang! What does it mean to say, wringing our hands, "We entered the atomic age"? It means that we have "a new weapon of death and destruction." But that has happened often enough in history. In his *The History of the West* W. H. McNeill emphasizes that the new weapons have often explained the rise and fall of empires. One of those empires that kept succeeding each other in Mesopotamia (I cannot remember which) succeeded by the discovery of the stirrup. Once both hands were free, because the stirrups kept you on the horse, you could do all kinds of mean things to your enemy, even fire an arrow from your bow. The stirrup and the atom bomb are of a different order—but there is a connection.

True enough, the nuclear bomb gives us the power "to wipe out human life and civilization." It is an awesome fact. But it cannot be allowed to paralyze us and exempt us from all other moral responsibilities and concerns. The bomb is no excuse for fecklessness in our private lives—although it is used openly as such an excuse for all kinds of instant gratification, since "we may not be here tomorrow," and for refusing responsibility, as in a decision not to have children—and it is no excuse for it either in our public lives. The belief that the world will soon come to an end has occurred again and again in our history. As the Black Death swept over Europe, no one could explain it; and as it arrived in villages, in towns, almost wiping out whole populations, it seemed to come from nowhere. It radically altered the social and economic life of Europe, and entered powerfully and permanently into the European consciousness. To the medieval mind, it *was* the nuclear bomb. If the bomb makes people feel nerve-racked, dislocated, aimless, lonely, threatened by unidentified dangers, and all the rest, then one can only answer that they are the kind of people who would find something else to make them feel nerve-racked, dislocated, aimless. . . .

To say, as Raymond Aron said, that we live in a world of "virile weapons and impotent men" is claptrap. We live in a world of deadly weapons and virile men (and women), and one proof of their virility is the agonizing development of the strategy of deterrence. Deterrence and the protracted intellectual exercises given to its development are evidence of mankind's rationality, and his ability to use that rationality to control a threat even of his own making.

Today's obsession with the bomb is of quite recent growth—since the middle 1970s. There may be many reasons for this obsession. There is no Vietnam War to provide a "good cause." The environment, which quickly succeeded Vietnam when the draft was eliminated, has proved to be an unsatisfactory, murky issue. Always to be marching up and down against toxic wastes, however legitimate, is in the end a rather parochial concern. But there is always the bomb. I objected to the coverage of the Hiroshima anniversary most of all because it (unintentionally) fed an underlying anti-Americanism that can only paralyze the exercise of American power.

HENRY FAIRLIE

The second-generation think tank.

HERITAGE HYPE

IN 1973 the Heritage Foundation was a small, unimportant, and ignored organization, surviving on the fringe of Washington life along with dozens of other committees, councils, coalitions, centers, and institutes that seek without visible success to influence the government. The heyday of Gerald Ford wasn't conducive to Heritage's far-right politics, and the slightly unsavory reputation of Heritage's primary donor, Colorado brewer Joseph Coors (a fervent anti-union owner and a sponsor of the John Birch Society), didn't help. The small think tank was clearly about as far from the Washington mainstream as you could get. Twelve years later, it is the most important think tank in the nation's capital. It recently moved into a ten-million-dollar new office building two blocks from the Capitol. At the celebration of Heritage's tenth anniversary in 1983, President Reagan said with rare accuracy, "Historians who seek the real meaning of events in the latter part of the 20th century must look back on gatherings such as this."

The term "think tank" doesn't do Heritage justice. On the one hand, the term conjures up anachronistic New Frontier memories: Harvard professors brimming with "tough-mindedness" and expertise preparing to shape up

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a flaccid government and bring peace to Southeast Asia. On the other, "think tank" evokes contemporary visions of thoughtful experts, lost in the pleasures of mindless respectability and intellectual torpor, addressing Vital Issues in 450-page monographs.

Heritage is a different creature—and that is the reason for its success. Edwin Feulner, the president of Heritage and a graduate of Wharton business school, is Washington's leading public policy entrepreneur. His foundation operates on a far shrewder understanding of the new power of the media and bureaucracy than traditional think tanks such the Brookings Institution and the American Enterprise Institute. Heritage's innovation is to combine the structures of a research group, a public relations firm, a special interest lobby, and an employment agency into one organization. If Heritage isn't as powerful or as influential as it claims, it is certainly better at what it does than anyone else.

Heritage promotes a diverse right-wing agenda. On foreign policy, it supports using paramilitary force against a wide variety of regimes allied with the Soviet Union. It enthusiastically endorses Star Wars, urges renunciation of the ABM treaty, and is a key sponsor of the campaign to dump Secretary of State George Shultz for his alleged softness. On domestic policy, Heritage is more libertarian than fundamentalist. Banning abortion and instituting school prayer receive far less attention than dismantling the welfare state by privatizing public housing, the post office, even Social Security. Often Heritage's ideas verge on the crackpot. Eileen Gardner, a Heritage education analyst, wrote in 1983 that the handicapped "falsely assume that the lottery of life has penalized them at random. . . . Nothing comes to an individual that he has not, at some point in his development, summoned." This thesis destroyed her chances of getting a job in the Education Department.

FEULNER AND OTHERS often make sweeping claims about the foundation's influence on Reagan administration policy. In 1980 Heritage published "Mandate for Leadership," a thick compendium of proposals for a conservative president. In 1982 Heritage claimed that 62 percent of the proposals in "Mandate" had been either enacted or acted upon. It's a silly statistic. Heritage hardly deserves credit for the B-1 bomber just because one of its policy specialists wrote in 1980 that "a new strategic bomber will be required to replace the aging B-52s." Many others proposed the same thing. Countless administration actions originated from different sources and can hardly be attributed to Heritage.

Heritage's impact on the media is more substantial. For three straight weeks in November and December 1984, not a day passed without at least one article—and sometimes two or three articles—in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* on some aspect of "Mandate for Leadership II," a follow-up volume on "Continuing the Conservative Revolution." Whether Heritage came up with the original ideas for specific policies that become law is almost beside the point. Heritage helps shape what people in Washington talk about after they read the morning paper. It helps set the agenda.

At least part of this influence has nothing to do with the intellectual quality of Heritage's work. Heritage simply packages and presents its ideas far more skillfully than any other Washington think tank. The foundation's 105 staff members produce 270 policy papers a year. All position papers are written to pass what is called the "briefcase test": they must be readable in 20 minutes (an astute estimate of the attention span of most Washington reporters and congressional aides). Phillip Truluck, the executive vice president at Heritage, says the marketing of ideas is as important if not more important than the ideas themselves. "It's like selling Palmolive soap," he explains.

NEW STUDIES are hand-delivered to every cabinet officer and member of Congress. The names and specialities of 1,500 congressional aides, 700 executive branch officials, and 3,500 journalists are stored in Heritage's state-of-the art computers. Reporters who want a Heritage publication need only make one phone call; Heritage will deliver it free of charge the same day. In contrast, reporters who want a current Brookings Institution book must send their own messenger with a written request on letterhead stationery. Such door-to-door service makes a difference in who prevails in the Washington political debate. If it didn't, why would Heritage go to all the trouble of providing it?

Heritage also has an institutional capacity for placing people in government jobs, something no other think tank has. The foundation lists 39 former or current Heritage employees who have full- or part-time jobs in the government. The traditional think tanks often serve as halfway houses for the eminent, a place where famous people go *after* making a name for themselves, not before. Charles Schultz, the former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers under Jimmy Carter, now hibernates at Brookings; former Reagan aide David Gergen and former U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick have offices that they seldom use at AEI.

Heritage does it the other way around. It employs an "executive branch liaison," a position unknown at other think tanks, who tries to land jobs for Heritage employees. "Our job is to tap policy experts here and push them into power in the administration," says Louis Cordia, the current liaison. None of Heritage's former employees holds an important-sounding policy position—which is one reason they're important. "Heritage has been really useful to the White House in filling those non-glorious mid-level policy slots which are in effect the nuts and bolts of decision-making in government," explains William Schneider, who once wrote position papers for Heritage and is now under secretary for security affairs in the State Department. Heritage specializes not in big shots but in special assistants.

The power of these officials is their longevity. Unlike higher-ranking jobs, these positions do not turn over every

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four years. "Heritage will be the best network in D.C. in ten years," says Roger Mahan, a former Heritage PR man and a former official of the Agency for International Development. "The numbers having gone through Heritage will be so spread through the power structure in ten years that a dynamic will be created that can't be ignored by anyone."

This combination of conservative principles and effective politics has in turn drawn the support of corporate America, including 87 of the 500 biggest companies in the country. "From the standpoint of the business community, there's no reason why that shouldn't be 487," says Feulner. No reason indeed. Heritage can be counted on to put aside conservative principles if they conflict with corporate interests. Heritage, for example, is only "lukewarm" about the Reagan tax-reform plan, according to Heritage's economic analyst Bruce Bartlett. Heritage opposes crucial aspects of the plan precisely because they would force business to compete in the free market rather than be subsidized by the taxpayer. It opposes the elimination of the loopholes for the oil and gas industries; the loopholes are "justifiable deductions," Bartlett says. Manuel Johnson, a former Heritage adjunct scholar and now assistant secretary for economic affairs at the Treasury Department, says, "The leaders of Heritage know their contributors expect that Heritage will come through for them."

There is obviously an element of exaggeration in some of Heritage's boasting. Louis Cordia asserts that Heritage has placed 75 people in government jobs, although a foundation spokesman can only provide 39 names. And at least a few of those 39 are unsurprising. For Samuel Francis, a former Heritage national security analyst, to land a job with Senator John East, a quiet clone of Jesse Helms, was more a shipment of coals to Newcastle than a sign of unusual clout. Heritage's direct influence on Congress is also easily overestimated. One Republican senator told *The Washington Post*, "I think their time has sort of passed, at least up here [on Capitol Hill]. Their ideas, or what I've heard of them, are too draconian to be achievable."

That, of course, was what people said in 1973 too. Those who dismiss Heritage's influence altogether miss the point. Heritage is set up to influence government in a way that no other organization in Washington is. Traditional think tanks know the power of ideas. Single-issue organizations know the importance of feeding and caring for reporters. Special interest lobbyists know the importance of anonymous bureaucrats. Heritage knows all three.

JAMES ROSENTHAL

James Rosenthal wrote "The Myth of the Lost POWs" in the July 1 issue of TNR.

The politics of life and death in the nursery.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT 'BABY DOE'

BY CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

If physicians are going to play God . . . let us hope they play God as God plays God—Paul Ramsey

BETWEEN 1977 and 1982 a group of Oklahoma doctors conducted an experiment on children born with spina bifida. Spina bifida is a congenital malformation in which the spine does not close and is often exposed through the skin. It can lead to paralysis, retardation, and other disabilities. Before treatment became available in the early 1960s, the condition was almost universally fatal. The purpose of the experiment was to determine which spina bifida newborns to treat and which to let die. Doctors divided the infants into two groups. Those with a more favorable prognosis for a good "quality of life" were selected for immediate and aggressive treatment (surgery to close the spine, shunting water away from the brain, antibiotics). All of these babies survived. The other group of infants deemed to have a poor "quality of life" prognosis was selected for no treatment at all. Parents demanded treatment anyway for five of them, and three survived. Of the rest, all 24 died within 189 days.

This May the doctors and the hospital were threatened with a suit by groups representing the disabled and by the ACLU. The charge was discrimination against the more severely affected children. They were denied treatment because they were deemed to be not worth saving. That they were not medically beyond saving was shown by the survival of three of the five whose parents insisted on treatment even though they were chosen to die. The nontreatment decision proceeds from "a eugenic premise," writes Martin Gerry in the July issue of *Law and Medicine*, "not . . . that a child cannot or will not live, but . . . that the child should not live."

The remarkable thing about the clash between baby

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"With the debate raging over "Star Wars," it is a relief that a distinguished scientist has now explained the subject in a book that is brief, lucid and comprehensible."

—The Wall Street Journal

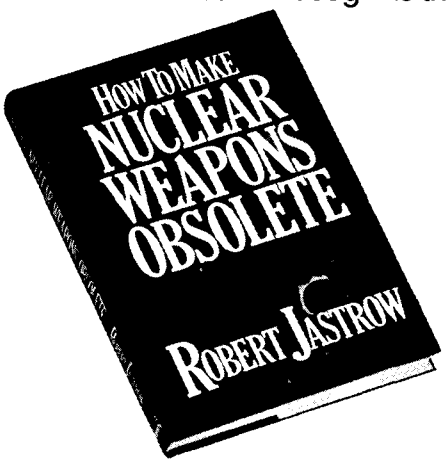
How To Make Nuclear Weapons Obsolete

By ROBERT JASTROW

Founder of NASA's Institute for Space Studies and First Chairman of the NASA Lunar Exploration Committee

"Advances in modern science give us a non-nuclear defense against missiles," says Robert Jastrow in *How to Make Nuclear Weapons Obsolete.* "No development could be more favorable to the cause of ending the nuclear arms race. If both the U.S. and U.S.S.R. have an effective defense against missiles, both nations must then recognize the futility of a continued competition in building weapons of mass destruction."

Renowned for his ability to make the most complex scientific matters understandable to a lay audience, Dr. Jastrow explains what Star Wars is, how it works, and how it can protect the world from the nuclear menace.



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doctor and baby advocate—and an indication of the gulf of incomprehension that separates them—is that there was no need for daring undercover work here. The doctors published their study in the October 1983 issue of *Pediatrics*, one of their profession's leading journals. They clearly felt they had nothing to hide. The Oklahoma doctors consider what they did to be accepted, if novel, practice. The baby advocates call it euthanasia. Or, as one of their cause's most prominent propagandists, Nat Hentoff, likes to say: murder. How can reasonable people come to such wildly different conclusions?

To start with, the doctors pretend to too much reasonableness. The tone of their article, a tone of unrelieved moral flatness, seems designed to provoke indignation if not litigation. "The 'untreated survivor' has not been a significant problem in our experience," they write. "All 24 babies who have not been treated at all have died at an average of 37 days." Success. Their description of the "selection process" is casual, lacking the slightest awareness of the awful historical echoes associated with that term. And their moral calculus is so technologically streamlined that it yields results like: "Whatever decision the parents make, it is important that they be relieved of any sense of guilt." Any decision?

Still, you don't, or shouldn't, get hauled into court for transgressions of tone. You get hauled in for murder. Was this murder? There is a real question here: If we must make life-and-death decisions on behalf of others, can we ever morally choose death?

IS THERE A LIFE worse than death? Judging from how adults act and talk, yes. Voluntary death is a not irrational response of people to intractable pain, or imprisonment, or dishonor, for example. (There is even a large body of opinion that would add communism to the list.) We do not assume that life is automatically the supreme value. In deciding for ourselves whether there is a life worse than death we would weigh the costs and the benefits of continued existence. But in deciding for others, as we do for a newborn, the first question is: Whose costs and whose benefits? Whose interests count: society's, the family's, or the patient's?

The societal consideration goes something like this: we are a vast society with vast needs and scarce resources. Even scarcer resources are allocated to medicine. The cost of saving and maintaining a sickly child (or adult, as Governor Richard D. Lamm of Colorado, has argued) is huge. That money could be better spent saving and sustaining many others. As Lamm put it to the elderly some years ago, at some point "we all have a duty to die" and make room for others.

This idea usually goes by the name of triage, and has almost no application to "Baby Doe" disabled newborns. For one thing, in their treatment, resources are not scarce. They are a tiny number every year, and the reason that they are not treated vigorously is to spare them or their families anguish, not to spare the country respirators. Second, even if there were a shortage, it is one thing to tell the elderly to drop dead. They can weigh the invitation and choose. An infant chooses nothing. He is at our mercy. And mercy—and justice—dictate that in deciding whether he is to live or die, the federal deficit not enter the calculation.

Generally, however, a different calculation is made. When families and their doctors decide not to treat a defective newborn, they are not balancing society's costs and benefits, but the family's. That includes, of course, the newborn's, but also those of the rest of the family: siblings, parents, even the "marriage" itself.

Now, these are not frivolous considerations. But they cannot be morally relevant to a decision about the life or death of a child. That idea commands a remarkable consensus in the ethical literature. The President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine, for example, declares that any criteria for nontreatment must "exclude consideration of the negative effects of an impaired child's life on other persons, including parents, siblings, and society." Family members can and should be made to yield certain goods to accommodate other family members. They cannot be made to yield their lives.

In weighing life against death for a child, therefore, there is no place for the utilitarian calculations of others. It is impermissible to add the interests of society or even the family to the scale. The only standard is the child's own best interest.

WHO IS to represent that interest? An immediate corollary of the "child's best interest" standard is that one cannot assume that the best representative is the parents. There is a widespread assumption that parents should make unmolested life-or-death decisions for their children because they act as the child's proxy. They don't. No matter how well intentioned, parents cannot disentangle their own best interests and that of their family from that of the newborn. Nor can the doctor. He has the parents, the family, and his own profession to think of.

That is why there is a need for Big Brother, as both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* derisively called federal intrusion into the nurseries of the country to try to prevent non-treatment of handicapped newborns.

The complaint against Big Brother usually takes three forms. First is the claim that "decisions about a child's medical care" (as the *Times* describes what was at stake in a 1983 spina bifida case on Long Island) should be left to parents and doctors. This claim rests on a linguistic sleight of hand. What is being decided in a spina bifida case is not which medical treatment is most likely to benefit the child, but whether life itself will benefit the child. Once the latter decision is made, the medical treatment is straightforward. The question is not how to preserve a life, but whether. The first is a medical question; the second, a moral one. To confuse the two is to engage in what Robert Veatch of Georgetown University's Kennedy Institute of

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Ethics calls "medicalizing value choices." Neither doctors nor parents, nor doctors and parents together, have a special moral sense.

A second defense of parental autonomy rests on "privacy." But in a society where child labor, child abuse, and even withholding a child from school have been deemed a legitimate concern of government, it is absurd to claim privacy for decisions about life and death.

The final defense of parental autonomy, therefore, is the notion that the parents are the child's true proxy. But it is simply false to assume that they necessarily act in the child's best interest. To ask that of a parent is to demand a rare degree of selflessness. Sainthood is not easy to mandate and it should not be the basis for policy.

THAT WAS PROVED dramatically in the case that started the current round of debate, the case of the Indianapolis Baby Doe. That baby was born in April 1982 with Down's syndrome and an easily correctable digestive problem. Without correction, however, the baby could not take food and would starve to death. The parents refused to order surgery. An appeals court upheld their right to make that decision. Baby Doe starved to death six days later.

Easy cases make good (moral) law. Even *The New York Times* could tell that Indianapolis Baby Doe had been wronged. In this case you could not even begin to argue that the child was allowed to die in its own best interest, in order to be spared a life of suffering. Down's syndrome babies can grow up to live rich lives. They suffer from varying degrees of retardation and some other disabilities. The extent of these, however, is wholly unpredictable at birth. As Louis Lasagna, a physician and father of a Down's syndrome child, says, their principal social disability is a "congenital inability to hate." This Baby Doe was sacrificed to the interests of others.

The "child's best interest" standard gets us partway there: it rules out deciding life or death on the basis of society's needs (triage) or on the basis of the family's. As a corollary, it rules out relying solely on parents as proxies. But saying that the surgeon general or a hospital ethics committee or a guardian *ad litem* should superintend any parental decision only opens the argument. Whoever decides, how are they to decide? What *is* the child's best interests?

Specifically, can it ever be death? We know from the action of sentient adults that the answer can be yes in at least two medical contexts: patients with intractable pain and patients who are dying and for whom all that medicine can offer is heroic and pointless prolongation of the process. These are easy cases. Consider a difficult case. Consider a patient who has severe spina bifida, resulting in paralysis, retardation, and recurrent medical illness. Consider, in other words, those babies in the Oklahoma experiment. What are their best interests? The President's Commission concludes that "permanent handicaps justify a decision not to provide life-sustaining treatment only when they are so severe that continued existence would not be a net benefit to the infant." "Net benefit" suggests those cost/benefit, quality-of-life considerations that the Baby Doe advocates so vociferously oppose. It sounds like a very liberal criterion. Except, adds the commission, that "the surrogate is obligated to try to evaluate benefits and burdens from the infant's own perspective."

The implications of this last condition are enormous. For adults who have known otherwise, spina bifida or some other severe disability might be considered a fate worse than death. But the child will have known nothing else. He must compare spina bifida not against normal life but against no life. If we are enjoined to make a decision from his point of view, it seems we must always choose life.

And that, argues philosopher John Arras (in an especially lucid analysis published in the April 1984 issue of the Hastings Center Report, which suggested much of this argument to me), leads to a conclusion that contradicts "moral common sense." In effect, the "child's best interest" criterion harnessed to the "child's point of view" requirement forces the following conclusion: that the only possible justification for withholding treatment is pain. There is no existence so blighted, so constricted, so isolated, so terribly cut off from human warmth or potential development that we can be induced to let it end mercifully.

This cannot be right. "Moral common sense" suggests that there is such an existence. Philosopher Richard McCormick has tried to elaborate that feeling. "Life is a relative good," he writes, "and the duty to preserve it a limited one. . . . Life is a value to be preserved only insofar as it contains some potentiality for human relationships." There are certain irreducible attributes of personhood, and if they are "simply nonexistent or would be utterly submerged or undeveloped in the mere struggle to survive, that life has achieved its potential." In other words, it is no longer worth living. It is not that "some lives are valuable, others not," says McCormick. "Of course [the individual] has, or is, a value. The only point is whether this undoubted value has any potential at all, in continuing physical survival, for attaining a share, even if reduced, in the 'higher, more important good.' "

Arras puts it more simply: there are some existences for which there do not exist "interests" to speak of. Then the "best interest" criterion itself collapses and, with it, the injunction to preserve life.

THIS LINE of reasoning contradicts the Kantian view, represented best by theologian Paul Ramsey, that "persons are not reducible to their potential." That sounds better than McCormick, I admit. But it is, I think, impossible to live with. Giving absolute primacy to life is meant to keep us from the slippery slope, but unfortunately life takes place there. If you believe that life is a divine gift, which man has no right to refuse, that is one thing. But it is difficult to accept the secular argument that no deprivation

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of human endowment could ever warrant the choice not to perpetuate life. If there is no relatedness, no human context for life, then it is hard to see where the "best interest" criterion is violated. I could produce (and you could imagine) a hypothetical example so awful—so awful that I cannot bring myself to write it—as to empty the "best interest" standard of any meaning.

My argument is, however, purposely hypothetical and theoretical. I don't want to be forced by Ramsey to say "never." In the extreme, it seems to me that Arras's "moral common sense" prevails. An equally important point, however, is that, practically speaking, we rarely face such extremes, even in spina bifida. Some choices are made in hell, but we don't encounter them terribly often on earth. And hardly six times a year in Oklahoma.

Even according to McCormick's criteria—a potential for relationships and development—the Oklahoma spina bifida babies did not warrant non-treatment. Since the 1960s, aggressive treatment has kept alive a large number of spina bifida children. And more than just kept alive. Only 30 percent of them are retarded. Even those with hydrocephalus, one of the conditions that apparently led the Oklahoma doctors to categorize a baby for non-treatment (though the criteria are never made explicit), have a better than 50 percent chance for being intellectually normal if they are treated reasonably early and do not develop meningitis.

The morality of the Oklahoma experiment is quite reversed. The experiment ostensibly proves that if certain severely affected patients are not treated, they will die. But before 1960 spina bifida was almost universally fatal. The proposition to be proved was already known. Moreover, the study implies that the "natural" death of those who were not treated provides retrospective moral justification for non-treatment. The experiment proves the opposite: given current technology, these were unnatural, certainly unnecessary, deaths. The experiment discredits itself.

WHAT TO DO about it? All this moral talk is fine, but how can the political system possibly regulate the issue? The Reagan administration learned a rude lesson about regulating the nursery. After the Indianapolis Baby Doe case, the administration rushed out regulations requiring posted warnings in the nurseries and inviting calls to a hot line about medical neglect of impaired newborns. This led to a storm of protests from liberals (the *Times*), libertarians (the *Journal*), and doctors. Two judges agreed, and threw out two sets of Baby Doe regulations.

Then, in October 1984, Congress enacted amendments to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act that expanded the definition of "medical neglect" to include "withholding of medically indicated treatment from a disabled infant." The final regulations issued by the Department of Health and Human Services in May 1985 were less intrusive than Baby Doe I or II: we shall have smaller warning signs, hidden from general view, aimed only at medical personnel rather than passersby. But these regulations establish strict criteria for non-treatment, more Ramsey than McCormick. Treatment may be withheld only if it will prolong dying or cause too much suffering. Quality-of-life considerations are excluded. I would have preferred including them and defining them strictly (that is, "from the child's perspective"). But apparently the prevailing view was that overbroad regulations would give doctors with Oklahoma-like inclinations too much discretion. There will now be error on the side of life. We could do worse.

The strictness of these regulations is, however, mitigated by two interesting features. First, "withholding of medically indicated treatment" is recognized as a species of child abuse, and not of discrimination, as the administration had wanted. This bureaucratic distinction has serious implications. To prove discrimination you need only prove that a normal child would have received treatment. To prove child abuse you must prove that the child's own best interests were violated. The second consideration is more relevant. (If it is in a child's best interest not to be treated, so what if a nonhandicapped child might have benefited?) Furthermore, it focuses attention, albeit in veiled form, on quality of life.

THE SECOND FEATURE is a small testimony to the ultimate wisdom of the democratic government. As Professor Thomas H. Murray points out, "given the enormous fuss"—the protests and hearings and recriminations that preceded the issuing of the Baby Doe regulations—"one might imagine that physicians and hospital administrators would be summarily executed if they violated the rule." And yet the regulations threaten neither criminal sanctions nor civil action. The penalty for breaking the new Baby Doe rules is . . . loss of federal child-abuse money. The incongruity between sin and sentence is at once astonishing and sensible. It seems the most reasonable way for politics to deal with so tortuous a moral issue: a strict standard and light punishment. At the rawest cutting edge of moral life, the function of law should be not to punish, but to educate.

The rule, the suit, the debate, the fuss make me perversely optimistic. It is commonplace to claim that as our society has become more technologically advanced, we have become less and less sensitive to the value of human life: the technological imperative—an imperative for cleanliness, physical perfection, and ease—has made us insensitive to those human beings who don't fit the mold. Conservatives argue that society is conveniently disposing of those infirm at either end of life whose continued existence is a burden on society. I think not, or at least not more so than in other times. In previous ages, infant mortality was so high that it bred a certain callousness about the value of early life. Historian Joseph Kett writes: "Parents left their infants alone for long periods, seem to have been indifferent to their welfare, could not even remember their names, refused to attend the funerals of children under five, routinely farmed infants out for wet nursing, and

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argued in divorce proceedings, not over which parent could have the infant, but over which could send it packing." As for the severely deformed newborns, these were known as "monsters," and since "monsters were not [considered] human," says Kett, "their destruction was not viewed as murder." This is not just ancient history. It is reported that in England the rate of stillbirth of babies with spina bifida was 40 percent in 1958 and zero percent in 1962. It was between those two dates that treatment of the condition became possible. The stillbirths were almost certainly not stillbirths. They were obstetric euthanasia.

In fact, ours is a society enormously attentive to those in the dawn, the twilight, and the shadow of life, as Hubert Humphrey used to describe the young, the old, and the sick. And it is becoming increasingly attentive to the disabled newborn, who is all three. The Oklahoma doctors are learning that right now.

The author wishes to thank Dr. Arthur Caplan of the Hastings Institute for his assistance in researching this article.

The danger of resegregation.

'VOTING RIGHTS' TRAP

BY ABIGAIL THERNSTROM

WILLIAM BRADFORD REYNOLDS, the assistant attorney general for civil rights, was hanged for the wrong crime. Not that he was innocent, but the jury was misled. Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee who blocked his promotion to become the deputy attorney general claimed to question his credibility. Yet the real issue was certainly his civil rights policies. And on what *The Washington Post* called "the murky political ground of busing and quotas" they had a case; that is territory on which he and the organized civil rights community stand opposed. But on voting rights, the most controversial issue of the heated confirmation hearings, Reynolds has in fact over the last four years not opposed but collaborated with the civil rights community. "On voting rights we're not going to be all that different," a Reagan spokesman promised in 1981. The administration has been true to its word. In part, voting rights is the most difficult area of civil rights law in which to reverse prior policies; the "right to vote" retains an apple pie and motherhood image. In part, however, the Reagan administration has not changed policies because voting rights is one issue on which black and Republican interests coincide.

The Voting Rights Act was 20 years old on August 5, and by now its apple pie aura is camouflage. The right to vote no longer means the right to go into a polling booth and pull the lever. It once did, of course. When Martin Luther King Jr. led the march at Selma in 1965, a majority of Southern blacks were kept from voting by fraudulent literacy tests, intimidation, violence, and other obstacles. But the passage of the Voting Rights Act, in the wake of King's march, ensured basic enfranchisement. Voting rights cases still abound, and the voting section in the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice has plenty to do, but not because black ballots remain insecure. Today an alleged voting rights violation is a districting plan that contains nine majority-black districts when a tenth could be drawn. The question is thus: To how much special protection from white competition are black candidates entitled? When a different plan might give a seat to another black, should the interests of white incumbents give way to the goal of minority office-holding? Is there cost to blacks when a single seat is gained but more widespread influence is lost? Voting rights is clearly an affirmative action issue—distinctive only in not being acknowledged as such.

Reynolds, Senator Arlen Specter declared during the hearings, has taken positions "directly at variance with established law." True, but with respect to voting rights, not in the sense he meant. Reynolds has wandered from the law precisely in the direction the civil rights groups take. Both make the number of blacks in office the measure of black representation. But they neglect the fact that minority representation might actually be increased not by raising the number of black officeholders but by increasing the number of officeholders, black or white, who have to appeal to blacks to win.

The Voting Rights Act does not lay down any single measure of black representation. It does subject changes in electoral procedure in "covered" jurisdictions (located primarily in the South) to Justice Department approval. Newly proposed methods of voting will not be "precleared" if the department finds them to be discriminatory either in purpose or effect. Those undefined terms give the department interpretative leeway, but not as much as it

Abigail Thernstrom is writing a book on minority voting rights for the Twentieth Century Fund.

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routinely takes. Changes in the method of voting have a discriminatory "effect," the Supreme Court has made clear, only when they leave minority voters worse off. Those that actually increase minority electoral power are not to be condemned. The Court's interpretation both is inherently sensible and squares with the structure of the act. It relegates to federal administrators a limited, and thus manageable, task: stopping efforts to pull black voters back from gains they would otherwise have made, preventing backsliding, or "retrogression." And it leaves in judicial hands the power to settle broad questions of electoral equality that require an "intensely local appraisal"—specific, detailed, idiosyncratic knowledge such as only a local court can obtain.

The Supreme Court talks, it seems, and no one listens. The Civil Rights Division has been consistently deaf to its message—abandoning with abandon the "retrogression" test. What the High Court has precleared, the Justice Department will not. Reynolds's record has been little different from that of his predecessors. In fact, inventive new detours around the law is his likely legacy.

PERHAPS the point should be slightly revised. Briefs and letters signed by Reynolds fall into two categories: those that maintain a hollow pretense of adhering to the law, and those that don't even bother to put up a front. The pretense was maintained in the brief that argued that blacks in Sumter County, South Carolina, actually lost ground when they acquired the right to vote (in at-large elections) for their county commissioners; appointment by the governor in that more than 40 percent black jurisdiction was allegedly preferable. It was maintained as well when the Department of Justice argued that a 1983 districting proposal for the South Carolina Senate should be compared to a malapportioned county-unit system not in use in the previous 19 years. The state had created nine majority-black districts where there were *none* before. The plan would seem to have been a radical improvement over the previous one, which provided for multicounty, multimember districts, all of which contained white majorities. In the years between 1964 and 1983, six districting schemes had been precleared; in reaching back to 1964 and arguing "retrogression," the department ignored that history, dismissing plans lawfully in effect.

Sometimes slippage may be found by measuring a plan against one that is "fairly drawn." The "fair" drawing is frequently done by the department itself, which will show a jurisdiction how more "safe" black districts can be created—just to guide, not to coerce, of course.

Backsliding is a comparative, before-and-after test. But to ask whether a districting plan is "fairly drawn" is to measure discriminatory "effect" by some absolute standard of "racial fairness." In doing so, the department implicitly ignores the Supreme Court's quite different focus on relative standards of "retrogression." It often does so openly. All pretense of resting objections to proposed districting schemes on a finding of "retrogression" is dropped when plans are said to "needlessly fragment" black communities, create "excessive" minority concentrations, or fail to "fairly reflect" the minority population.

Thus Reynolds has objected to proposed North Carolina Senate and congressional districts, to plans for the South Carolina Senate, the New York City Council, the board of supervisors in Adams County, Mississippi, and elsewhere for not "fairly reflect[ing] black voting strength." He refused to approve a commissioner precinct plan for Uvalde County, Texas, arguing that it "unnecessarily fragment[ed]" the Mexican-American community, and thus had the "inevitable effect" of diluting minority voting strength. Likewise, Texas state legislative districts in two counties "unnecessarily fragment[ed] minority concentrations." Needless "packing," however, tainted congressional districts in Texas and those for the Virginia House of Delegates. Reynolds vetoed a plan proposed by Sumter County, Georgia, because "alternative plans" would result in "more effective black majority districts." In the Justice Department files a letter containing an analysis that squares with the Court's interpretation of the law—which applies the retrogression standard as the Court has applied it—is a rare find. But one need not even peruse the department's eye-glazing, disorderly record to get the picture. A good look at recently announced guidelines for the enforcement of the preclearance provision will do; indifference to Supreme Court rulings is plain to see.

The routes around the law that Reynolds has sanctioned have precisely that end to which the civil rights groups are committed: a maximum number of minority officeholders—which usually means a maximum number of "safe" minority districts, districts with 65 percent black and Hispanic concentrations. The department, it is true, sometimes settles for less. Reynolds, for instance, approved a congressional district for New Orleans that was only 44.5 percent black when a higher percentage could have been obtained. The plan, however, was an improvement over the preceding one, and the white incumbent was likely to win, whatever the racial composition. On another occasion, involving a racing commission in Greene County, Alabama, he objected to a change and then changed his mind, on the ground that the question was beyond the scope of the Voting Rights Act. The commission, which runs a local dog racetrack, is a major source of revenue for the mostly black county, and control had been switched from the county's legislative delegation (predominantly black) to the governor. Not *every* decision by Reynolds has been one that the civil rights groups have agreed with. But the preponderant pattern is the point. The overall record differs little from the one the civil rights groups themselves would create.

THOSE GROUPS never liked the Supreme Court's relative test for discrimination. The proper question, in their view, is whether the proposed change in electoral procedure has left blacks and Hispanics worse off than they *might* be—not than they were. And they define worse off as a reduction in the number of safe minority districts, although the influence of minority voters might be greater

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if more dispersed. They have been consistently impatient with the notion that simple administrative rules of thumb are inappropriate to racially and politically complex environments, and that without them the department is adjudicating competing claims about racial fairness that only a court should handle. On these various scores they have had no argument from Reynolds. To a remarkable degree he has enforced the law as they envision it.

Such terms as "fairly drawn" and "fairly reflects" were not invented by Reynolds and his staff. Citations always accompany their use. Inappropriate ones, however. For example, minority voters are entitled to electoral arrangements that "fairly reflect" their numerical strength following an annexation. This is a rule which applies in that context only, however. Responsibly read, its use in redistricting cases violates legal precedent. For example, a district court decision involving Wilkes County, Georgia, is often invoked. The county wanted to switch from single-member districts to at-large voting. The court compared the effect of that change with the consequence of choosing one of the "options for properly apportioned single-member district plans." It suggested, that is, that any equal population plan was likely to result in one safe black district, and required an assessment of any proposal to pay heed to that fact. The D.C. court did not demand, as the Justice Department insists, that the jurisdiction devise a districting scheme that would maximize black office-holding; it did not (and could not) overturn Supreme Court rulings. The use of citations in Justice Department documents has become a form of art. By pasting together phrases from decisions, lifted out of context and distorted, the department invents law. It creates a legal collage out of known but altered elements.

SUCH ARTFUL contrivance may now be unnecessary. Reynolds has handed the civil rights groups perhaps their biggest victory. In 1982 a hitherto unimportant provision in the Voting Rights Act was amended to allow plaintiffs in every state to bring suits in local district courts challenging methods of election allegedly discriminatory in "result." Members of Congress were assured that the change implied no alteration in preclearance provision, yet on exceedingly flimsy grounds Reynolds has sanctioned just that. It will now be asked of every revised electoral procedure submitted for Justice Department review: Does the proposed change deny minority voters an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice? Does the "totality of circumstances" suggest electoral inequality between minority and white citizens?

This is truly murky water, in which courts have consistently found themselves in trouble. They will now be joined by federal administrators, remote from the scene, playing plaintiff, defendant, and judge all rolled in one, with no reliable way of gathering information on race and politics in the local jurisdiction remotely comparable to that which opposing attorneys present at trial. Cases take weeks to try; the Justice Department necessarily engages in almost snap judgments, on the basis of which it will now insist on electoral arrangements that square with its unstated, inevitably subjective standards as to when ballots "fully" count.

Reynolds reportedly argues that what Congress wants, it is getting—that he is, in effect, following orders. That defense suggests an odd reading of legislative will, as well as otherwise concealed habits of deference.

REYNOLDS'S RECORD on voting rights—both before and after 1982—has another possible explanation: what is good for black candidates is good for Republicans. That is, Republicans stand to gain from what the civil rights groups want: single-member districts drawn to maximize the strength of the minority vote. As a consequence of a compromise reached between South Carolina and the Department of Justice (joined by the NAACP), the state increased the proportion of black voters in two senatorial districts. In the ensuing election, in four districts from which blacks had been drained, conservative Republicans replaced incumbent liberal Democrats. In a North Carolina case, state Republican leaders have openly acknowledged the "happy coincidence" between the interests of blacks and Republicans. Indeed, they have much to celebrate. Following a voting rights suit, the state was forced to replace its multimember plan with one that contained only single-member districts. The change contributed to the doubling of the number of seats held by Republicans. And ironically it is Democrats—usually quick to charge the Republicans with lax civil rights administration—who are unhappy. "Safe" black districts, they say, isolate black voters and deprive liberal white Democrats of crucial black support.

Twenty years after the Voting Rights Act, there is both much to celebrate and to contemplate. In 1965 black ballots were assured. As a direct consequence, blacks have become a political force that even Strom Thurmond must reckon with. Minority candidates—both black and Hispanic—have acquired as well extraordinary protection from white competition. That protection is undoubtedly necessary in those Southern communities in which legislative seats appear to be still largely reserved for whites. But its almost indiscriminate availability comes at an unacknowledged cost. "Safe" minority districts lessen the need to build grass-roots organization—the foundation for long-run gains. And they do not necessarily serve immediate black interests. "I am bitterly opposed to any effort to resegregate me. . . ," a black judge in Norfolk, Virginia, testified at a voting rights trial. "What does it help—how does it help the black community to limit itself to two predominantly black wards and be of no consequence in the remainder of the community? Political power is not simply symbolic," he went on. Resegregated politics, blacks politically isolated and in the minority, a more passive electorate, fewer liberals, more conservatives—these are among the costs that the current policy may entail. The voting rights question is the least discussed, most complex affirmative action issue. This anniversary is a good time to begin the overdue debate. □

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STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Telling Titles

Kiss of the Spider Woman is one of those lurid titles that are used as a kind of slumming, a tip that the work is so serious it can afford initial irony. Thus it's obliquely more portentous than a grim title. Edward Albee brought the trick off with *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* But *Spider Woman*, a Brazilian film adapted from a novel by Manuel Puig, doesn't come near earning its wryness.

Kiss of the Spider Woman
(Island Alive)

Péril
(Triumph)

At the start the camera travels slowly around a prison cell while we hear a man describe a glamorous woman in a luxurious setting. After moving past pasteups of female film stars, past a crude dressing table, the camera lights on the face of a homosexual prisoner, Molina, as he winds a red scarf around his head and applies lipstick. He continues the story, which is of a film he has seen, and the camera continues: to show us his cell-mate, Arregui, apparently not homosexual and not much interested in the story. Molina's narrative is illuminated by flashes of the black-and-white film itself, which is about the adventures of a Parisian chanteuse under the German occupation and which eventually shows her realization of error in siding with the Resistance, her eventual embrace of her German lover.

But that's revealed later. Here, near the beginning, we come back from the black-and-white film into the underwater colors of the cell. Molina is completely naive about the film's political contents. We have seen, for instance, the Germans arrest some Jews in yarmulkes and have heard Molina describe the prisoners as Turks. Arregui identifies them properly from the other man's description, but Molina doesn't care: he's interested only in the clothes and affairs of the heroine.

We move into the lives of these two cell-mates. The country, Latin American, is not named, but the picture was shot in São Paulo and the signs that we see are in Portuguese. (The dialogue is in English.) Molina is in jail on sexual counts. Arregui is a political prisoner, badly bruised from his interrogation; in fact, since he confessed nothing, he doesn't know why the interrogation has ceased. We soon find out. He has been put in a cell with Molina because, as we learn in the warden's office, the homosexual has been promised parole if he wins Arregui's confidence and gets some information.

Friendship develops between the two men, especially when, on different days, each is made ill by poisoned food and is helped by the other. Though Arregui is not gay, affection, too, develops between them after much bickering. Then Molina tells the impatient warden that Arregui might disclose secrets if he knew that Molina were about to be paroled and could help him outside. The warden agrees. After the two men's last night together, in which they make love, Arregui gives Molina a telephone number and a message. A few days after his release, Molina phones the number, with calamitous results.

The story—at least as adapted by Leonard Schrader—is invested with weighty themes that leak away. We soon know about Molina's espionage and why he's doing it. We are then asked to believe that Molina is converted from self-gratifying treachery to self-sacrificing idealism through his one sexual experience with Arregui: that he is now truly in love and will keep faith unto death. Then the clever Molina, on his way to a rendezvous with Arregui's political friends, spots the police on his tail yet keeps the appointment anyway, thus leading the police to their quarry. And what is Arregui's place in this drama? Given half the space both in the cell and the story, his only function is to be so impressed with Molina as a result of their one amorous night that he confides in the other man, which leads eventually to his further beating and to death. In dramatic terms he has nothing to *do*.

Insofar as the film has a point, it's a silly sentimental one. A night of love changes a frivolous gay into a selfless hero and convinces Arregui, supposedly a knowledgeable, worldly man to begin with, that gays have potential nobility. This proposition seems offensive to everyone concerned, including the audience.

The director, Hector Babenco, made *Pixote* a few years ago, a heavy-handed, Buñuel-plus-heartbreak saga of a ten-year-old street criminal. Babenco's subtlety here is exemplified by a touch when the two men sink into the shadows to make love. The candle by the bed is extinguished, and the camera closes up on the wick that glows in the dark.

Sonia Braga, last seen to display more flesh than talent in *Gabriela*, shows less flesh and even less ability in what are laughingly called three roles, all in flashback: the chanteuse in the narrated film, Arregui's sweetheart in a "real-life" flashback, and the Spider Woman. (I forgot to mention that Molina also briefly recounts part of another film, a fantasy about a Spider Woman.) In the last

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Dim Sum. Wayne Wang deals again with San Francisco's Chinese-Americans. Sententious cinematic overlay and ordinary story, but the people are lovely and lovable. (Reviewed 8/26/85)

The Home and the World. Satyajit Ray's gentle, perceptive treatment of Tagore's novel of change. East Bengal, 1907. (7/8/85)

The Shooting Party. If the symbolism were as deft as the dialogue, this beautifully mounted production would be first-class. Splendid cast in an English story, 1913, anticipating war. (6/17/85)

Wetherby. Vanessa Redgrave in Yorkshire today. A highly intelligent drama, written and directed by David Hare. If unsatisfying, it's still comparable with lesser Bergman. (8/12&19/85)

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scene more symbolism is shoveled on when Arregui's sweetheart leads him from his deathbed in the prison hospital to the Spider Woman's island, and as they set out in a boat, the black-and-white of the interior film changes to color. This has everything but meaning.

Raul Julia plays Arregui with continence and gravity. William Hurt sees Molina as a chance to do a gay, and he grabs greedily for audience approbation of his daring. It is a performance several substrata below Richard Burton's in *Staircase* or Marcello Mastroianni's in *A Special Day*. Obviously there is no one way to act a gay any more than a heterosexual, but Hurt goes for the mannerism rather than the character, even the character in love with mannerism. Add his tedious voice with its three-note range, and the result is poor—all the worse because of Hurt's usual suggestion of self-admiration.

Péril, by insisting on the acute accent, is another title that sets a tone, this time justified. It's a sophisticated French crime picture directed by Michel Deville, his 14th feature. I've seen two others, *Benjamin* and *Voyage en Douce*, neither of which was a thriller and both of which were duds. *Péril* is the first and not the second. Grant that, like so many thrillers accoutred with realistic detail, it takes place in that make-believe world where everyday people know immediately how to deal with bizarre and criminal actions. After that concession it purls along, the most high-toned French picture of its kind since *Diva*. Deville wrote the script with Rosalinde Damamme from a novel by Rene Belletto, and they have concentrated on speed and sex—and sex with speed—along with some inevitable deaths.

The plot is not strong on logic but is no weaker than most—I mean most good thrillers. The nub is a scheme that involves an impoverished young guitar teacher in a rich woman's naughty plans. Not the least of the story's conveniences is that the guitar teacher's father, an amiable old gent, perfects a small bomb—to prove that his factory was wrong to discharge him—just when the young man needs it.

The young guitarist is played—underplayed—appealingly by Christophe Malavoy. A courteous professional killer is played with reticent scariness by Richard Bohringer. Nicole Garcia is lissome as the errant wife, and Michel Piccoli, old Monsieur Depravity himself, is her seemingly complaisant husband. A spying lubricious neighbor in this lavishly housed community is played by a woman called simply Anémone, who is what the French call *une jolie laide*.

Deville is too much taken by flashy devices between sequences—not just iris-out and iris-in but such a stunt as a huge black telephone at the start of a sequence that whizzes away from us to be seen as a phone hanging in a booth in a long shot. Otherwise, *Péril* passes 100 minutes quickly.

Fiction and films are living off the fad of the land.

RURAL CHIC

BY ANN HULBERT

IN 1921 an American farmer's magazine ran a series of cartoons and comments on the theme "What a Farmer Really Looks Like." According to the drawings, the old stereotype of the rumpled hayseed was out. The farmer looked like a plain, well-pressed businessman. But according to the cartoonists' accompanying prose, the old American agrarian ideal hadn't changed. The wholesome farmer, they wrote, was the nation's moral and civic exemplar. As Richard Hofstadter explained in *The Age of Reform*, the cartoonists' acclaim echoed several centuries of rural rhapsodizing by politicians, poets, writers, preachers, and philosophers. "The American mind," he observed, "was raised upon a sentimental attachment to rural living."

The taste for rusticity is stronger now than ever. In the glossy magazines of the 1980s, what everybody really looks like, or aspires to look like, is a fancy, well-pressed hayseed. The rugged Ralph Lauren style is firmly à la mode—without any mud, of course. Beneath the fashion lies the old American fixation on rural life, which has been expressed in a bumper crop of regional fiction and earthy movies, and which is not—and has never been—the simple, sturdy sentiment it seems. "Hick chic," a craving among the quiche crowd for pure country vistas and prettified country values, helps account for the screen fad. But what might be called "hick shock," the fallout from recent decades of change in rural America, lies behind the more serious literary rural renaissance.

The columnist Jonathan Yardley coined "hick chic" in *The Washington Post* this spring, complaining that "the urban faddists haven't fastened on to Hick Chic out of any inherent merit or interest that they discern in it, but because they see it as yet another product with which to bedeck their lives." Two peripheral contributions to the fad—Albert Brooks's film *Lost in America*, about two L.A. Yuppies who "drop out of society" and go cross-country in a fancy camper, and Ann Beattie's new novel, *Love Always*, about ex-urbanites who work on a classy Vermont magazine called *Country Daze*—mock just that modish, materialistic side of the rusticity craze. And they're not the first. A century ago critics denounced "the fashionable, the idle, the curious, the faddish" who dabbled in the simple delights of the land.

But materialism has never been the only motive for appropriating the pastoral myth. The deeper inspiration of hick chic is populist romanticism, what Hofstadter called the "soft" side of America's agrarian ethos. Once upon a time, the nostalgic story goes, there was a golden age of natural harmony, until a commercial conspiracy came and crushed sturdy farmers and their communal culture. The story enjoyed a recent surge of popularity in the 1960s

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and 1970s, when a laid-back, utopian vision of the "greening of America" was in vogue among some counterculturists. The 1980s version is more earnest, emphasizing ecology and economics over personal consciousness-raising.

NOW, AS ALWAYS, this vision thrives best at a decent distance from "the people" and from rural rigors—particularly among members of the media. On the radio, the old-fashioned medium, there's Garrison Keillor, who tells half-nostalgic, half-mocking stories about the small rural town of Lake Wobegon, Minnesota—"where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average"—on the popular American Public Radio show "A Prairie Home Companion" (and now in a book, *Lake Wobegon Days*).

In Hollywood, where the stories and wit aren't so homespun, the decline and fall of the farm has become a very popular plot. Jessica Lange and Sam Shepard look suitably angular and anguished in *Country*. Sissy Spacek's and Mel Gibson's blue eyes burn with determination in *The River*. There are more fields and stars in *Places in the Heart* with Sally Field, in *Witness* with Harrison Ford, and in Jane Fonda's television film *The Dollmaker*. And the brave cowboys who helped to found America's Western farms in the first place are back, too. After several decades of almost total eclipse, the Western has been officially revived. The American Film Institute called its spring fund-raising gala "Once Upon a Time in the West." Lawrence Kasdan's *Silverado* is one of the summer's big splashes. Clint Eastwood, now in *Pale Rider*, is hip, not passé. (And the actor in the White House gets his best reviews in rustic settings—out on his ranch, with hat and horse or chainsaw.)

To hear the filmmakers talk, the two genres have nothing in common except perhaps their scenic views. Where Kasdan emphasizes that he's aiming for pure innocent entertainment and naive nostalgia ("This is an attempt to get back to what excited me when I was 12 years old," he told *The New York Times*), the stars of four of the farm films proclaim their serious dedication to a current social cause. In testimony before the House Democratic Caucus Task Force on Agriculture, Jane Fonda suggested that she and her fellow cinematic farm wives (who all appeared to testify and to shed tears) were updating that Henry Fonda classic, *The Grapes of Wrath*, to suit the contemporary scene, where foreclosures threaten the family farm with destruction.

In fact, Kasdan's aim is not quite so ahistorical as he claims, and the farm films' portraits are not so accurate. Both genres endorse the well-worn populist little good guys vs. big bad guys conspiracy theory of history. Then, in what makes for a very incongruous combination, they add a dollop of contemporary liberal cultural values—precisely the values that not so long ago inspired an anti-rural trend in the media. As Ben Stein noted in *The Public Interest*, rural small towns were once routinely depicted by the media as a threatening source of evil, ignorance, and repression (think of *Deliverance*, *Macon County Line*, *The California Kid*, or that other Fonda classic, *Easy Rider*). Stein suggested, somewhat schematically but usefully, that Hollywood's hostility reflected warring cultural politics: liberal, urban, often Jewish Hollywood writers vs. conservative, homogeneous rural America.

The peculiar terms of the new peace aren't at all awkward for Kasdan. The incongruity helps broaden his appeal. For the kids, there's the old tale of noble cowboys (in league with innocent homesteaders) vs. the corrupt sheriff. For the grown-ups, there's a trite dose of traditional family and community values, suitably diluted with liberal therapeutic and post-feminist sentiments. His cowboys are "compassionate and caring," in search of stability because "everyone is seeking a family unit and that makes sense as a way of making order in the world."

With their social ideals at stake, however, the stars don't want to face up to the tension between their Hollywood poses and values and the hick story. These celebrities present themselves as spokeswomen for simple rustic virtues, as if their screen experience made that perfectly plausible. Fonda told Congress, "As actresses whose work is to identify with what is most human, we cannot confine ourselves to the screen while the cruel and unusual punishment of farmers grinds on." But it's hard to know what the farmers who staunchly supported Reagan would make of Fonda's claim that the Reagan administration wants "to subsidize silos for MX missiles but not for family farmers," or Lange's warning that "this memory will camp right alongside the memory of the American Indian, the memory of Vietnam, and all our other memories that are intimately related through greed and arrogant disregard."

Whatever the farmers or legislators may think, the harder the stars work at making a hybrid of Hollywood and hick, the less compelling their films are. *Country*, which Lange coproduced with a lot of fanfare, and *The River*, which Spacek produced, are virtual clones and laden with clichés. The basic story: a contemporary farming family is suddenly in desperate financial trouble, thanks to the ravages of nature (a cyclone in *Country*; a flood in *The River*) but above all to the heartlessness of the credit system.

THE POLITICS in both amount to the familiar, primitive agrarian view that a city slickers' conspiracy is at work—plus the Hollywood twist that rustics with true grit will triumph. *The River* even offers a flesh-and-blood devil. Not satisfied with the standard banker who relays the harsh message of the marketplace and vetoes the farmer's loan, this movie features Joe, an agribusinessman who has a Washington politician in his pocket and ruthlessly schemes the ruin of farmer Tom (Mel Gibson). "Start squeezing like you said you would," Joe orders the banker, who, trembling and tugging his fore-

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In Country by Bobbie Ann Mason (Harper & Row, 245 pp., $15.95)

Leaving the Land by Douglas Unger (Ballantine, 313 pp., $3.50)

Lonesome Dove by Larry McMurtry (Simon and Schuster, 843 pp., $18.95)

Love Medicine by Louise Erdrich (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 272 pp., $13.95)

Machine Dreams by Jayne Anne Phillips (Pocket Books, 373 pp., $3.95)

The Beans of Egypt, Maine by Carolyn Chute (Ticknor and Fields, 256 pp., $15.95, $7.95 paper)

Country (Touchstone)

Places in the Heart (Tri-Star Pictures)

The River (MCA)

Silverado (Columbia)

Witness (Paramount)

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lock, of course obeys. And that's not all. This serpent also tries to tempt Tom's wife (Sissy Spacek) to insurrection against her husband by dangling visions of life on Easy Street.

On the question of sexual politics, the producers play on more up-to-date, liberal sentiments. These two, as well as *Places in the Heart* and *Witness*, are "women's movies," not just farm films. The stars are singled out as superwomen—they don't merely cook and raise kids, they manage the farm's accounts, they fix machines. But updated with feminist references, the tradition of the strong farm wife—a central but hardly liberated figure in rural life—looks less authentic, not more. The social dynamics of community life in *Country* and *The River* seem equally contrived. For a quick and formulaic scene of solidarity among the oppressed, the directors stage a gathering of usually gruff farmers who suddenly speak up in unison for a beleaguered family in their midst.

What rescues both *Places in the Heart* and *Witness* from similar predictable corniness is precisely their unvarnished treatment of that theme of community values. In fact, they have confronted the most persistent challenges to community life in this country: race and religion. *Places in the Heart*, a version of the farmer's-wife-holds-onto-her-land-against-all-odds story, is really about Christian ideals and racial realities in Waxahachie, Texas, during the Depression. And it's basically a convincing portrait of their tenuous relation in a devout place at a racist time. Similarly, cinematic smoothness doesn't finally prevail in *Witness*, where the "rurban" love match—between detective Harrison Ford from the lawless city and an Amish woman from the God-fearing countryside—can't work, for precisely the reasons that it might be desirable. There's no room in the rigid, authoritarian Amish way of life for a man so worldly and wild—just as he can't dream of staying.

These two movies have registered a few tremors of "hick shock." The usual romantic rural ideal has been jostled into more complicated relation with a larger world. That harder version of the agrarian ethos has always coexisted with the soft, chic variety. But it hasn't gotten nearly as much play, not least because it tends to be endorsed by those closer to the actual soil—and thus further from the cultivators of PR. This portrait realistically acknowledges that there is no golden past. American farmers, outside the East at least, have never neatly fit the role of independent laborer linked with his neighbors in a traditional village way of life—especially as they've become more successful, which means more spread out and automated. From the start, they have been inextricably part of a larger commercial system. They produced for a market, not just for their own groaning boards; they borrowed, speculated in cheap land, invested heavily in machines, moved a lot.

FROM *THE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN*, OCTOBER 22, 1921
"WHAT A FARMER REALLY LOOKS LIKE" BY JOHN KNOTT

To recognize these facts of life means embracing a less radical view of the farmer's place in the always risky marketplace than the populists preached; rather than victims of a conspiracy, farmers and rural folk are part of a fast-changing commercial order, a convoluted federalist structure. It also means adopting a less romantic notion of the rustic's place in his own, smaller world. The question that writers have often turned to country enclaves to answer—what kind of community spirit, or lack of it, exists in America?—becomes more pressing, and perplexing. Neither populists, who readily endorsed a repressive and bigoted notion, nor liberals, who envision a therapeutic blend of individual freedom and fraternal "supportiveness," have had very realistic answers. The recent run of rural fiction suggests that rural communities have always been precarious places.

The full force of hick shock has been recorded by a group of country-born and -bred authors who, like Faulkner, Welty, and O'Connor before them, aren't exactly romantics on the subject of rural life. If anything, in fact, their vision may be a little studiously unsentimental and stark. As novelists, they're not objectively reporting from the heartland; they're writing from their own hearts, and they discover truths by exploring predicaments that may well be more traumatic than typical. Douglas Unger, Louise Erdrich, Carolyn Chute, Jayne Anne Phillips, Bobbie Ann Mason, and even Hollywood-dipped Larry McMurtry—to name roughly a year's worth of the most acclaimed hick writers—are themselves one sign of America's geographical shake-up. They're now competing with the coastal cities and their writers for readers and for prizes.

That's not to say these writers are just plain folk who are out scrabbling among the chickens when they're not scribbling. The one who comes closest, Carolyn Chute, made quite a stir precisely because of the rarity of the real hick writer. Married at 16 and a grandmother at 37, she is now married for a second time to an illiterate man and lives on a Maine back road that could well be in the tar-paper town of Egypt in her novel *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*. But the others too have spent most of their lives on the land they write about. Louise Erdrich is a member of the Chippewa tribe she writes about in *Love Medicine*, which won a National Book Award. Larry McMurtry, from a family of "cowboys first and last," has produced his long-awaited big Western, *Lonesome Dove*. And three first novelists—Douglas Unger, whose *Leaving the Land* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize; Jayne Anne Phillips, author of the much-praised *Machine Dreams*; and Bobbie Ann Mason, whose forthcoming *In Country* rates a "bestselling campaign" by her publisher—join the rest as unapologetic regionalists from the roots up.

When they talk, some of these writers sound ready to launch into the familiar populist line. "I want whoever reads my book to care about the working poor," Chute told *The New York Times Book Review*. "Either people blame all

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the country's ills on them or they don't see them." Phillips explained to *Publishers Weekly*, "I think writing about so-called ordinary people is a political statement because it's talking about everyday life and why it's worth defending against whatever forces." The books' bare themes, too, recall Jessica Lange's reflexive litany—the memory of the traditional American family farm (the inspiration for *Leaving the Land*); the memory of the American Indian (the source of *Love Medicine*, and a thread in *Lonesome Dove*); the memory of the Vietnam War (the central concern in both *Machine Dreams* and *In Country*). But these ostensibly nostalgic preoccupations look more complicated almost as soon as the narratives start.

FOR when they write, these authors don't invoke a golden agrarian age destroyed by a capitalist conspiracy. The social and economic background of their novels is filled in with considerable care. The rural scene is basically grim. Though only one novel is strictly a farming story, in all of them the land—swampy or dusty—figures prominently. The terrain has been familiar to several generations of families, but none too fruitful for them. The effects of change are ambivalently registered. As for smaller-scale community life, which is in the foreground of this fiction, it is an ambiguous bastion, often repressive and not always reassuring.

That is familiar enough from the stifling Southern sagas that have dominated American rural and regional writing. What is striking is to see some of the same tangled terrain transplanted to open spaces further west, the source and setting of much contemporary rural writing. (It's not just Louis L'Amour who is thriving; so is a younger generation of more serious writers, as a recent anthology, *Writers of the Purple Sage*, proclaims.) Larry McMurtry's mock epic about a trail drive from Texas to Montana is set in the 1870s, but its theme is the large and relevant one of uprooting in the West that pervades the literature. Turning to the Midwest, Douglas Unger updates it, mapping the fate of a family farm in 20th-century South Dakota.

The short era when cowboys drove cattle from ranches on the edge of civilization to outposts in virtually unexplored territory took place right after the Civil War. That was also the beginning of the long era of urbanization in America, and McMurtry's anti-mythic treatment of the trek depends on a comic, and sharp-eyed, juxtaposition of wilderness and settlement. Both are stripped of their elevated and starkly contrasting associations. It's restlessness, not necessity, that prompts Gus and Call, former captains in the Texas Rangers, to set off in the first place, and they don't find natural paradise. (The scenes of Indian battles; of poisonous snake swarms; of lightning, hail, sand, and insect storms are appropriately gruesome.) It's inevitability, not choice, that will bring settlers in their wake, and civilization has plenty of dangers and battles of its own: "Why, women and children and settlers are just cannon fodder for lawyers and bankers," Gus the great gabber drolly explains.

> "They're part of the scheme. After the Indians wipe out enough of them, you get your public outcry, and we go chouse the Indians out of the way. . . . Finally the Army will manage to whip 'em down to where they can be squeezed onto some reservation, so the lawyers and bankers can come in and get civilization started."

UNGER PICKS UP the story of settlers, lawyers, and bankers in the next century, and his tone is more serious but just as unsentimental. *Leaving the Land* is stocked with facts, which constitute a social and economic history of one town and one family from roughly 20 years before World War II to 20 years after it. The outlines are familiar enough: Marge Hogan and her father, Ben, slave to sustain a farm on the hard gumbo soil of South Dakota, weathering not only natural hardships but man-made ones as well. Yet there's real tension in the story that unfolds. The financial trouble is more complicated than a loan officer or a fiend. For the Hogans, who manage to survive the Depression, precariousness begins when they borrow to enlarge the farm. Debt and difficulty then pile up as they try to adjust to government crop directives during the war and to cope with the incursion of Nowell-Safebuy, a large agribusiness that buys up some farmers, bullies others.

The way out is far from clear. Marge marries the decadent lawyer for Nowell-Safebuy and moves to town, but that's hardly the start of rurban harmony. Nowell-Safebuy's so-called "vertical integration" scheme fails, as impersonal efficiency proves to be less than it's cracked up to be, and the town shuts down. The Hogans' hereditary integration fails too; familial steadfastness can't always be counted on. Marge doesn't return to the farm after her father's death, daunted by "that kind of hard work and endless days." When she in turn passes it on to her son, he is loath to shoulder the burden.

FEW OF THE other writers so ambitiously or overtly fill in the socioeconomic background of their characters' predicaments. Yet there's a sense of public history at work in most of them. The forces that helped produce Chute's corner of New England decay and Erdrich's run-down Indian reservation in North Dakota are, the authors suggest, so far removed as to be essentially forgotten—both by the richer world beyond, and by the inhabitants themselves. Yes, edicts from Washington have wreaked havoc on the Chippewas, but several generations of hardships closer to hand have also intervened. The Beans are degenerate, dependent poor, rather than working poor like their neighbors, because that's what time brings—just as banged up cars left in the front yard eventually turn into piles of rusted junk. Far from romanticizing their characters as defiant victims, these writers if anything incline the other way. The Indian ritualism and the backwoods religion that sometimes surface in the two books almost aggrandize the characters as compliant victims: their degradation is progress toward union with nature.

Mason's and Phillips's settings are two states, Kentucky and West Virginia, awkwardly caught between North and South, and above all between rural and urban. Mason's 17-year-old protagonist "shudders at the idea of growing up on a farm, doing chores, never getting to go to town," and indeed she goes all the time, to buy the latest records, to hang out at McDonald's and Burger Boy (all the while wishing there were a mall). But the idea of farm life isn't so far removed; her grandparents grow soybeans in their fields (which command a view of an industrial park beyond), and she has to wonder if she would be there too, had her father come back from the war.

The event that has shaken up those places has distinctly not been forgotten: the Vietnam War—the war directed from the city that sent off country boys and brought deadly machines into the dreams of provincial people. "It was

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country boys," says the mother of *In Country*'s protagonist, Sam, who is preparing to leave on a long-awaited drive from Hopewell, Kentucky, to Washington, D.C., with her uncle, a Vietnam vet.

> "When you get to that memorial, you look at the names. You'll see all those country boy names, I bet you anything. Bobby Gene and Freddie Ray and Jimmy Bob Calhoun. . . . Boys who didn't know their ass from their elbow. Oh, God, what a time that was."

Both Mason and Phillips emphasize what a time of violent disruption and disorientation it was; families came unraveled as they rarely had before. But it's not all simply a scheme by a distant apparatus. Those boys flocked to war out of duty, but also out of eager, confused restlessness. Those who came back—and those who didn't—have passed on a legacy of uneasy longing for something better.

YET THAT confused restlessness is nothing new. The true triumph of realism over romanticism in this fiction is the convincing portrait of life in rural communities, where discontent and disorientation have long been as common as dirt. Living near the land or on it means, before almost anything else, poverty. And it means grueling work, and equally grueling recreation. Violent drunkenness and promiscuity are specialties of those who don't labor, the Bean brood and the Chippewa clan. But those who slave away superhumanly—Unger's farmers and McMurtry's cowboys—also console themselves with yet more physical excess. For Mason and Phillips's small-towners the sex isn't so prevalent and violent but it's sad. Drink, and now dope too, are not secret vices.

Family ties often seem more a trap than a help. An unsettling theme lurks in these novels, surfacing insistently and explicitly in *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*: incest, especially the father-daughter variety. The Beans' interbreeding is the main subject of Chute's effectively claustrophobic, skin-crawling saga. Even her protagonist, Earlene Pomerleau, who marries into the Bean family from a more respectable house across the road, seems familiar with the sin (her own father shared a bed with her). The Kashpaws, Lamartines, Morrisseys, Lazarres, and Nanapushes of Erdrich's *Love Medicine* live an equally violent and degrading life, filtered through a set of strangely lyrical narrative perspectives. Although the characters' consciousnesses seem to float in eerie isolation above their messy lives, their bodies are related in such convoluted ways that it would be hard to tell relatively innocent sex from incest.

Young Marge Hogan in *Leaving the Land* has supplanted her ailing mother as her father's real helpmate on the farm, and he looms ominously large in her life.

> She saw his face press in to kiss her like his lady. She saw him dancing with her at the Grange Hall dance when there had been nobody else . . . slapping her behind and telling her, "Look what a sight you are! Look what a sight you are! One of these days your mama's going to the devil and you're coming with me, goddamnit."

Sam Hughes in *In Country*, who has lost her father in Vietnam, lingers in Hopewell to play the anomalous role of daughter/wife/sister to her unhappy uncle Emmett—even though her remarried mother wants her to come to Lexington and be a student at the University of Kentucky.

FOR THE BEANS and the Chippewas, there is essentially no community beyond the morass of family. For the others, the web of social relations that extends beyond their houses isn't the sturdy one that rural romantics like to extol. In fact, this fiction tends to emphasize a sense of isolation, interrupted by crises that promote a tenuous, not triumphant, solidarity. One of the comic themes in *Lonesome Dove* is the awkwardness of the social code of the traveling cowboy caravan. There's not much easy male-bonding en route, and stopovers in town are a mess, complicated by scheming whores and cowardly or corrupt lawmakers. In the end the motley crew manages to rally in the face of danger. The inhabitants of Nowell in Unger's novel anxiously pull together during the war, when the women huddle in worry, and during Safebuy's onslaught, when a farmers' cooperative is formed. Mason's Hopewell residents, in the town and on outlying farms, are haunted by a sense of dislocation and estrangement. The anxieties of local Vietnam vets are the pretext for a stab at communal activity—a melancholy, disappointingly hollow affair.

The characters all chafe, eager to escape something, they're often not sure what. They yearn to get a car, to figure out who they are, to be somebody for

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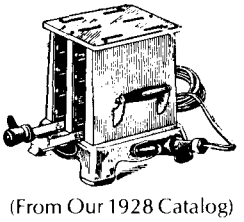

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an audience more responsive than the mute earth, a mumbling mate. That yearning is, of course, the start of the old and often-told story about setting off for the city to seek one's fortune. But this rural fiction is not just a prelude to that tale of personal triumph or tragedy in the metropolis. The country is the center of attention, and the source of a resigned but rigorous sense of allegiance. Rural life may be cramped and awkwardly anachronistic, but the city isn't the answer either. These writers' map of life on the land is as textured as it is precisely because they don't portray the country as an isolated arcadia or an embattled bulwark. They see it as ineluctably linked to a more complicated order. Thus they've included machines, not just humans; work and politics, not just pastoral scenes; restive characters, not just well-rooted communities.

IT IS MORE than a matter of juxtaposing images, which is part of the reason the cinematic treatments are trite. The standard, almost archetypal contrasts need to be scrutinized. That's not easy, since nostalgia—long an obstacle to clear vision of rural life, as Raymond Williams showed in *The Country and the City*—naturally gets in the way. It's a common affliction, because adulthood seems to involve a sense of exile from arcadia. Childhood, or our memory of it, means living close to the land (even if there's no grass, only asphalt) in a world that feels as if it runs on natural rhythms and makes up a harmonious whole, familiar from the inside out. Growing up brings alienation, and the discovery of a colder view from the outside, both of oneself and the world. Rural nostalgia catches those contrasting values and holds them static, which can be a great comfort. Their synthesis remains a liberating possibility, precisely because it never actually comes to pass. Thus Hollywood stars can manically accumulate roles and stacks of money—and proclaim the enduring importance of more authentic, earthy values.

But for those who have stuck closer to home, homesickness doesn't strike so hard—which means that hopefulness doesn't run so high either. There is no natural call to a community of the soil, or to self-discovery in the wilderness. In *Leaving the Land* Marge's son, who knows he doesn't want the land she's passing on, suddenly discovers the plain secret that explains the attachment to the land that runs in some blood: "It was the knowledge of [his grandfather's] generation that if at first you don't succeed at life, you can always learn to plow." That's not a casual recourse. To settle for sustenance over successfulness is an all-consuming enterprise. Farmers, far from exemplars of settled contentment, live a life arduously devoted to process more than product.

The real story America's frontiersmen have to tell is not of triumphant adventure and accomplishment either. It's of long treks that keep restless men busy but don't bless them with fame or fortune in the end. In *Lonesome Dove* Gus offers this unadorned view of the enterprise: "I hope this land is hard enough for you, Call," he ribs his partner. "I hope it makes you happy. If it don't, I give up. Driving all these skinny cattle all that way is a funny way to maintain an interest in life, if you ask me."

A century later the popularity of that idea of life measured by arduous activity does indeed seem funny. What could seem less suited to a consumerist, careerist society? The incongruity explains, of course, much of the appeal of rusticity. The old self-sufficient ideal beckons for the obvious reason that it promises, as Wendell Berry put it, "an economy of necessities rather than an economy based on anxiety, fantasy, luxury, and idle-wishing." But there is a different way of seeing the same alternative, which complicates the choice. It's a contrast between a life devoted to the "low" labor of daily, seasonal, annual existence and a life with room for "higher" aspirations, less rudimentary accomplishments.

What's striking about the current rural fad is the prevailing willingness, eagerness even, to emphasize how brutal day-to-day life on the land is. The film stars join the novelists in playing up the physical travails, for there's romanticism in rigor these days. Everyone is proud to display the external signs of physical exertion—checkered shirts and chukka boots. Many are also eager to earn the rugged look by pounding their bodies into shape. The work ethic in general is not so square now. Thus sweat, usually in the background of arcadia, now glistens in the foreground—and the land's allure only grows.

But there is real ambivalence, understandably, about giving up those fantasies of riches and renown. The films ride the populist spirit that has made it fashionable to bash elitist institutions, bastions of the famous and fortunate. But the stars blur the issue, wielding their rakes for the spotlight and huge sums. The novelists convey the sense of fading pride, diluted with mounting disappointment, that comes with passing on a rural inheritance that seems a deadweight rather than an anchor of independence. And they raise doubts about the treasured notion that rural folk, who forgo the urban competition for success, thrive on a spirit of cooperation instead. The solitude of life on the land comes as no surprise, of course, and for some it's a great solace. But the loneliness in these books is not always liberating.

TALK SHOW

Carpenter's Gothic by William Gaddis

(Viking: Elisabeth Sifton Books, 262 pp., $16.95)

Like saints (to paraphrase Orwell), cult-novelists should probably be viewed with suspicion until proved innocent. For 30 years William Gaddis's 900-page first novel, *The Recognitions*, has been whispered about as though it were buried treasure—or a sacred shrine to which only a few highly qualified devotees were permitted entry. If you hadn't read it, you were probably unworthy of reading it in the first place. The fact that Gaddis did not produce another novel for 20 years has lent a special note of purity to his reputation: obviously such a man doesn't have to write for a living, or lower his standards to broaden his appeal.

While I am not aware that a comparable cult has formed around his second novel, *JR* has nonetheless been held out as a sort of challenge or endurance test. If the judges of the National Book

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Award, who gave it first place in 1975, could make their way through 700 or so pages of almost unrelieved dialogue of a particularly clangorous and abrasive sort, who were you to balk? It will be interesting to see whether the relatively brief *Carpenter's Gothic*, whose publication is accompanied by the reissue of its weighty predecessors, will nourish the cult—or perhaps drive a stake through its collective heart. It is in any case unlikely to profane the shrine by becoming a popular success.

THE RECOGNITIONS is indeed a prodigious book. Erudite and intricate, both polyglot and polymath, its scope embraces Flemish painting, demonology, alchemy, patristic theology, the science of perspective, aesthetics, and a whole galaxy of philosophical conundrums. Its settings range from Spain to New England, from Paris to Greenwich Village, and they are all delineated with a wealth of social and historical and physical detail. If Wyatt Gwyon, the novel's pivotal figure who produces "original" Flemish masterpieces, his wife, Esther, and a host of subsidiary figures do not emerge as exactly memorable characters, they are nonetheless somewhat more accessible to the reader's sympathies than the grotesques who populate Gaddis's later books. The tone of Olympian detachment with which the characters and other multitudinous concerns of the novel are presented precludes any really close involvement. It is very much an intellectual's book.

If the tone of *The Recognitions* is godlike in its aloofness, that of *JR* is simultaneously as angry and as icy as if the book had been engendered by the devil's semen. With consummate mimicry, Gaddis reproduces the dialogue—telephonic as well as face-to-face—of a batch of scheming knaves and bustling fools: school teachers and school administrators who speak the language of Board-of-Education directives; vapid and garrulous spinsters; a misfit composer; frantic stockbrokers and their rapacious clients; secretaries, company directors, and PR men; generals, senators, and drunks; nurses and hospital attendants—and, above all, a pushy, obnoxious sixth-grader, JR himself, who, mastering the jargon of business manipulation and paper-capitalism, manages to build a financial empire that is also a house of cards. Gaddis's own mastery of the jargon of wheeling-and-dealing is spectacular, and exhausting.

JR has been acclaimed as a comic masterpiece. There is indeed a good deal of comedy of a raucous and saturnine sort, derived mostly from the interruption or tripping-up of characters in their headlong verbal pursuit of their current obsessions. While the incongruities are sometimes harshly funny, they offer little relief—no leavening of wit, no trace of tender or forgiving humor—and should be regarded, I think, as implements of Gaddis's relentless indictment of our crass and acquisitive society. As a satirist, Gaddis makes the most of his uncannily accurate ear for banality, greed, hypocrisy, and stupidity as they reveal themselves in nonstop dialogue. His knowledge of the technicalities of commercial transaction is formidable and he uses it to create an elaborate metaphor of self-perpetuating folly.

But the impact of *JR* as satire is seriously weakened by the paltriness of its human targets and their petty concerns. The book cries out for a monster of Tartuffian proportions. Alexander Pope also slapped bugs, but he did so with an exuberance of fantasy and invention that is largely precluded by the tape-recorder technique that Gaddis employs. For a work of such length, *JR* produces an oddly airless and claustrophobic effect; 20 pages into it, I felt as if I had been trapped inside a telephone booth with a maniac constantly screaming into the phone—and there were still 700 pages to go.

CARPENTER'S GOTHIC might well have been subtitled "JR Junior." It, too, is written mostly in dialogue with a minimum of punctuation. The maniac is still screaming into the telephone. Mercifully, the new book is only about a third of the size of its parent.

Carpenter's Gothic spans a brief period in the lives of a blustering Vietnam veteran named Paul Booth, his much-abused wife, Liz, her brother Billy, a belated hippie who talks about Karma, and McCandless, a burned-out, despairing geologist from whom Paul and Liz have rented a ramshackle Victorian house—the "carpenter's gothic" of title. These are the principal onstage characters. The hard-drinking Paul and the masochistic Liz live in hopeless confusion and squalor: the downstairs toilet overflows, the mail is hidden under a bag of onions, unpaid bills and legal notices pile up, Paul's VA check can't be found, newspapers disintegrate. The trust fund from which Liz and Billy are supposed to benefit is tied up in litigation and financial chicanery of various sorts, leaving them strapped for cash.

But big-mouthed, hard-drinking Paul has big ideas. He is setting himself up as a consultant, and one of his clients is Reverend Ude, an unctuous Southern evangelical preacher with a huge radio and TV following and a mission in Africa, where he plans to spread the Word and at the same time fight the insidious advances of atheistic communism. He is the principal offstage character. Also eager to expand its operations in Africa is a powerful mining enterprise that Liz's dead father had once headed and

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for which Paul once worked. The right-wing Senator Teakell gets in on the act. McCandless, the aging geologist, is believed to possess a map showing the location of a rich ore field he had discovered years before, and various sinister forces would like to get hold of it. Hysteria builds. Godless Marxism is on the march. Vital American interests are at stake. A 10k "Demo" bomb is exploded off the African coast.

The complications of all this machinery defy summary. Most of the material reaches us secondhand, while we are trapped in the house with Paul and Liz and, later, McCandless. Paul's ranting conversations and telephone calls and McCandless's darkly cynical commentary are the main sources of our information. Here is a typical example of what goes on between Paul and Liz:

> —I get any calls?
> —You asked me that Paul, I told you Reverend Ude called, he. . .
> —Why didn't you tell me, been trying to reach him about that story in the paper did he see it?
> —That's why he called, to ask if you'd seen it, he. . .
> —Just told you Liz, I put it there.
> —You? put it there?
> —I placed it, what this whole thing's all about, I go in there as a media consultant get him in the public eye nationwide's what I've been talking about, get in there and do the job where is it, have you got it?
> —It's here somewhere, I brought it home but why you'd want to get him in the public eye nationwide with a story about. . .
> —Can't you see Liz? can't you understand? Networks trying to push him off the air I get him some exposure in the print media shows these politicians like Teakell the support Ude's got out there in the boondocks thirty, forty million of them Liz they vote. Born agains, creationists, two seed in the pod Baptists working on an Israeli tie in with these Jews for Jesus even got a few snake handlers from West Virginia every God damn one of them's a vote you think Teakell doesn't know that? . . . Not one political pie Teakell's thumb isn't into, Intelligence Committee Agriculture Armed Services he's got more seniority than Rip Van Winkle, keeps his name on the front page out there fighting Marxism with his Food for Africa Program here's Ude moving in with his Africa missions, Voice of Salvation radio spreading the gospel all the same God damn thing Teakell knows where the votes are. One word from him Ude's satellite transmission gets off the ground where's the paper, get that newspaper story . . . where is it, where's the paper.
> —It's, I'll find it. . .

And on and on. Gaddis establishes Paul as a thoroughly repellent character whose strident voice dominates the novel to the point where the reader wants to clasp his hands to his ears. McCandless is more complex and intelligent, and serves as a kind of *raisoneur* or spokesman for the raging despair and disgust that is the novel's ultimate message—a message that Liz at one point tries to rebut but so feebly as to have little effect. Some attempt is made to work up a degree of sympathy for poor Liz, to allow her a moment of hope and spirit when she goes to bed with McCandless, but she is too pathetic a creature to arouse much interest, let alone sympathy.

In both *JR* and *Carpenter's Gothic*, Gaddis is working in that very contemporary mode of abrasive paranoia that Pynchon and Don DeLillo have also exploited. His emotional scope is narrower than theirs—and his tone is more bleakly misanthropic. Misanthropy in the hands of a master—Swift and Céline come to mind—can be invigorating; it can purge the reader's bile through the discharge of the author's. But the masters of misanthropy have known the importance of range, of variety, of extravagance, and even of playfulness. They do not set out to bore the reader—as Gaddis seems deliberately to do. Reading *JR* and then *Carpenter's Gothic*, one senses a melancholy contraction, or withering, of the spirit of the intellectually avid young man who three decades ago produced *The Recognitions*.

ROBERT TOWERS

Robert Towers, a novelist and critic, is chairman of the Writing Division of the Columbia University School of the Arts. His most recent novel is *The Summoning* (Harper & Row).

THE BOURGEOIS MARX

Understanding Marx: A Reconstruction and Critique of 'Capital' by Robert Paul Wolff

(Princeton University Press, 235 pp., $25, $7.95 paper)

Against Fragmentation: The Origins of Marxism and the Sociology of Intellectuals by Alvin W. Gouldner

(Oxford University Press, 333 pp., $27.95)

Making Sense of Marx by Jon Elster

(Cambridge University Press, 556 pp., $49.50, $15.95 paper)

There is simply no stopping the continuous flood of books about Karl Marx. The laws of the trade cycle do not apply to production in this industry. No failure of demand can deter it; perhaps there is no failure of demand. If there is any cyclical rhythm, it is to be found in content. Gellner's First Law states that total output is constant, but that content fluctuates in accordance with a regular pattern. Themes go out of fashion, but reappear again in accordance with some principle of eternal return. Behold: the labor theory of value is back.

Robert Wolff's book has a highly specific thesis and is tightly organized. It gives pleasure for this reason, and also because it illustrates my eternal return theme. It brings me back to my long-lost youth: *à la recherche d'un Marxisme perdu*. Long, long ago, Marxism used to be about the labor theory of value. That was forgotten in the days when Marx the moralist and Marx the Hegeli-

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an replaced Marx the economist forever, or so it seemed. Now Wolff has brought it back.

THE labor theory of value has long had a dual function. It was meant both to explain prices and to justify or damn them. It all goes back at least as far as the famous justification of private property: a thing legitimately became a man's property when he had mixed his labor with it. This was a striking turn of phrase and it conveys vividly what we do indeed feel: If I clear a virgin bit of forest, it is mine, is it not? If you do not take the bit about "mixing" too literally, all this is in order.

Economists not merely took it literally, however; they tried to make it operational. Precisely how much labor has gone into this, that, or the other product? It may seem easy to measure the work-hours deployed, if what is at issue is the clearance of a virgin bit of forest with one's bare hands. But what if you used tools, as no doubt you did? You must also measure the work that went into producing those tools, and into the tools that produced them, and so forth. . . . Where will it all end?

Where indeed. Strangely enough, given his enterprise, Wolff is quite clear about all this:

> I should like to offer the judgment . . . that Marx . . . himself suffers from precisely the fetishistic confusions that he labors so hard . . . to expose. . . . Marx speaks as though the quantity of labor embodied in a commodity were a physical magnitude . . . a homogeneous ectoplasmic stuff. . . .

Marx had used the notion not in order to explain actual prices but to condemn the system that took away a certain proportion of the value from those who had produced it, and to give some seeming precision to this expropriation. The basic question that Wolff's book addresses is whether this notion is usable, salvageable, revivable. The answer he gives is a qualified yes—that, though Marx himself had lacked the technical tools to make it so, given the methods of modern mathematical economics, such as those developed by Nobel Prize-winner Wassily Leontieff, it can be done, though only with certain quite considerable restrictions. This possibility evidently gives Wolff a great deal of pleasure, which alas I cannot share. I can only conjecture that it enables the mathematical virtuoso and the generous moralist within his breast to feel that they are one and the same person, or at any rate that one of them succors the other.

The technicalities of the argument are too complex to reproduce here, but Wolff's conclusion is that the result which Marx needed, establishing that capitalists' profits equaled the surplus labor extracted from the workers, can be shown to hold (by modern methods not available to the Master), but only under certain conditions. Yet those conditions or assumptions are precisely those that contradict Marx's main criticism of capitalism.

> . . . since the focus of Marx's critique of capitalist dynamics was precisely unbalanced growth, with its attendant crises of overproduction, we must suppose that he would be unhappy to learn that his solution to the problem of the deviation of prices from values works only in the case of trouble-free balanced maximum growth.

In other words, you can have Marx's account of exploitation or his account of the contradictions of capitalism, but not both. Wolff claims, on the very same page, that "it is very difficult to tell" whether Marx would have been happy with this result. My own skepticism deserts me totally at this point. I'll put my bottom dollar on Karl's not liking it one bit.

INDEED, I cannot get over my puzzlement at Wolff's pleasure at it all. ("This is really an extremely powerful result.") It is all the more puzzling given the fact that Wolff has an acute sense of how utterly metaphysical and unreal is the notion of labor physically contained within an object. In fact, Wolff's book has taught me something more about the notion—that it is not just metaphysics, it is bad metaphysics. The intuition that it conveys is a thoroughly misleading one.

The idea was to think of the real objective value of an object as the summation of all the work that had been put into it, directly and indirectly, not only by its immediate producers but also by those who had worked on the tools that they used, and so on. This is a dramatic way of highlighting the dignity of labor, by making it the sole source of value.

But note what is being denied. The necessary causal antecedents of any object that I enjoy include not merely all the work that went into making it and the tools that helped make it, but equally the political and cultural pre-

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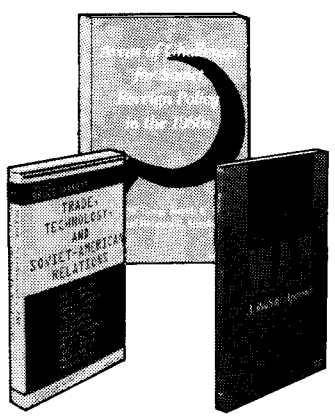

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conditions of production. Had those who used the tools not been able to work in peace, had they been harassed by physical aggression or been obliged to spend time and energy in warding it off, they would not have been able to produce what in fact they did produce. Equally, their work presupposed the collective cognitive equipment of the society within which they were working. So the real labor input of the object produced includes not merely the labor in the narrow sense, but also the contribution of the judges, the policemen, and all the others who helped keep the peace, and of the scholars and teachers who helped erect the cultural base of the society in question, and so forth.

THE LABOR THEORY of value is not just a bit of metaphysics, but a bit of bad metaphysics, because it enshrines the prejudice of a work-oriented bourgeoisie: they and they alone are truly productive, and those who man the socially ancillary services are really a lot of parasites. Economics was born in a century and a country within which a favorable cultural and political infrastructure could be taken for granted and seem almost invisible. (This remark is no doubt rather unfair to Adam Smith, for instance, who was fully aware of the specific and precarious conditions of good government, and of an entrepreneurial ethos.) Nonetheless, a state of mind in which men could innovate in productive activities without fear of violent spoliation was widespread, and there was a certain tendency to ascribe it to humanity as such.

Thus the labor theory of value initially expressed the projection of the bourgeois worldview onto mankind as such. By the time Marx came to use the theory, however, it acquired another purpose: that of damning the social order set up by the bourgeoisie and of seeming to measure, to give a precise account of, the particular and unique type of spoliation practiced by it. The fact that the technique ignores the political and cultural preconditions of productive work does not matter for Marx's viewpoint, precisely because he does not consider these to be essential. Mankind as such does not need the maintenance of political order so as to be able to work; mankind would work anyway, that being its "species-essence." A coercive political order is required only because there is distortion; it is a sign of social pathology. Likewise, the work ethic, the tendency to seek fulfillment through creative activity, is inherently human and needed no special historic soil; nor did the mental orientation permitting creative innovation and hence the augmentation of resources.

WOLFF'S resuscitation of the labor theory of value as a technical device seems without practical significance, but it has brought home to me how much this rather scholastic bit of Marx is all of a piece with his general vision. He was, at this point as elsewhere, the extreme and exaggerated expression of the bourgeois spirit. The essence of man is work; work being his fulfillment, it is a kind of insult that it should be remunerated, let alone enforced. In proper conditions, neither of these constraints will be necessary. The division of labor will remain, but it will be freed of all compulsion. Work-oriented burghers feel little love for the practitioners of coercion who despoil them, but normally they know that they must accommodate themselves to their existence. Their theorists tell them how, and under what conditions, the virtuosos of violence can themselves be restrained and their intrusion and cost be reduced to a minimum.

It is at this point that Marx goes to extremes. Be not deceived by the appearances of history, he says: it looks as if the swordsmen had dominated it, but that is mere surface. The swordsmen have no real power. It is at the level of production that the secret of history is to be found; coercion is and ought to be the slave of production. The most that violence can really do in history is be the midwife of structural change. Institutionalized, organized violence is simply at the service of an inherently pathological social order, which it can neither initiate nor save nor (on its own) abolish.

There is no reason whatsoever to hold this vision to be true, though it would be extremely nice if it were. It is simply bourgeois wish-fulfillment. It tells those who are work-oriented and hostile to coercion that a social order is possible—and indeed due to appear on the scene—in which their aspirations, which in any case correspond to the deepest essence of humankind, will be realized and will require no institutional protection. It is hard to imagine worse advice to humanity about to embark on the uncharted and perilous enterprise of organizing our social life in the new industrial era.

The bourgeois nature of Marxism is also the opening and pervasive theme in Alvin Gouldner's posthumous volume. According to the opening paragraph, "Marxism's proletarian communism begins in the theoretical work of two very advantaged sons of the well-to-do." This book, the editors tell us, was virtually complete at the time of Gouldner's death, though final editing and a final organizational plan were supplied by them. The discussion ranges far and wide, not to say wildly. The problem of the bourgeois element in Marxism seems to turn into the problem of the relationship of intellectuals to society. In the end, the elusive theme of the book seems to be the desirability of seeing society as a whole, as a totality.

> Marxism's epistemology, its sociology, and its politics thus all share a common deep structure, reunification of a fragmented world; and it is at this level that Marxism achieves its fullest rationality. Yet, as Marx might have expected, this reunifying rationality is not without its own contradictions.

And so on. The preceding sentence is alas rather typical of the book. Wholeness is good, it seems, whether in social life or in the understanding of it. I am afraid that this position simply isn't articulated clearly enough for one to decide whether or not to agree with it.

ALVIN GOULDNER was a cult figure, and it may be that no great service was done to him by the reconstruction and publication of this book. Jon Elster is a relatively young thinker whose talents, range, and energy may well destine him to become a cult figure as well. He speaks and draws upon the resources of a number of languages: French left-bank, American social science, Anglo-American analytical philosophy and logic. Since he went to study in Paris in 1968 (he is Norwegian), he has published no fewer than five books, which have already gained him a considerable international reputation. The work on Marx, which presumably was the nucleus of the present volume, preceded the other books, but it was then abandoned, as he tells us, due to what one might call the politics of the literary market. Because of his methodological approach, he would automatically be placed on the right (at least in France), and thus could not hope for a Marxist readership; meanwhile his residual

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Marxism would deprive him of readers on the right. What a dilemma! But it appears that either the world, or Elster's position in it, has improved sufficiently to permit him to dare publish a book combining both residual Marxism and the rigor of logic and style customary in the mainstream of Anglo-American thought.

THE RESIDUAL Marxism I find hard to understand, or even to fathom. On the final page Elster tells us that it is not possible today, morally or intellectually, to accept "all or most of the views that Marx held to be true and important." But within the same paragraph, he also tells us that most of the views that he, Elster, holds to be true and important can be traced back to Marx. What Elster means, I think, is that there is some persisting kernel of great merit in Marxism, which survives the falsification of his specific doctrines. (Again, it is not easy to square this with what Elster actually says in the concluding passage; there he explicitly includes "substantive doctrines" among the elements that he retains from the Marxist heritage. But one must take the spirit as well as the letter into consideration.) This kernel would seem to be located in the moral inspiration of Marx's work, but that in turn seems to be connected with the intellectual elitism of this thinker (a theme also conspicuous in the much less lucid Gouldner):

"*Capital I* is written for the happy few, by one of them. . . ." Elster writes.

> It is . . . an extreme feat of creativity. In the future communist society, everyone will be capable of understanding works of this stature. Indeed, everyone will be capable of writing comparable works, and devote most of their time to doing so. . . . Self-realization through creative work is the essence of Marx's communism. I believe this is the most valuable and enduring element of Marx's thought.

For various reasons, I have some difficulty in sharing this view. It isn't merely that the prospect of a society composed largely of assiduous authors of books as abstruse as *Capital* does not exactly turn me on. Surely if this rather elitist morality is the essence of Marx's appeal (Elster seems to belong squarely in the generation of the 1960s, with its moralistic vision of Marx), it wouldn't be hard to find the same allure in any number of severe and demanding moralists. But the importance of Marx seems to me to lie, to use his own terminology, in the fact that he was not utopian, that his values were linked to an analysis of how the world functions.

This being said, one must stress that Elster does say a large number of interesting things about Marx's doctrine, in an orderly and lucid way. For instance, he usefully points out the contradiction between the teleological and non-teleological styles of argument in Marx's work, or between his view that all economic history of mankind is marked by growth and the view that growth is a specific feature of capitalism. His account of Marx's view of the state owes too much, it seems to me, to Marx's special observations about the behavior of the bourgeoisie after 1848, and too little to the overall place of violence and coercion in the Marxian doctrine of salvation.

Though textually defensible, Elster fails, precisely, to make sense of Marx, as promised by the title of the book. In fact, he goes as far as to make this fascinating assertion: "To conclude, it is hardly too much to say that Marx made the autonomy of the state into the cornerstone of his theory." Admittedly, he qualifies this a bit, and then goes on to qualify the qualification, so that we don't altogether know where we stand. But if the state, in other words the coercive agency, can be autonomous, and hence not ultimately an echo of pre-existing economic interests, what happens to the theory as a whole? All its optimism for mankind hinged on the disappearance of coercion, when not engendered by a pathology of the productive process.

Not one of these books helps to explain the continuing fascination of Marx for Western intellectuals. Whether a future communist society will consist of a large number of authors all publishing works as hard as *Capital*, I do not know. But there appears already to exist a large sub-society composed of men writing books almost as difficult about the author of *Capital*—despite the fact that Karl Marx remains the worst possible guide to the problems of late industrial society.

The main problem is to restrain coercion and to preserve the liberal tradition that emerged with and alongside capi-

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talism, for liberty becomes a fragile commodity under conditions of rapidly diffusing industrialism. Among Marx's bourgeois convictions, he endorsed the idea that conflict would disappear when men no longer needed to quarrel about the surplus, and that this could be arranged by ensuring that men did not stand in special, asymmetrical relations to the means of production. Yet it does not seem possible to arrange this (though it is possible to centralize control over the productive equipment of a society), and there is no reason whatever to suppose that the desired consequence would in fact materialize, even if one could arrange it.

Marx's theory of the origin of social coercion is false, and he has nothing to teach us about how this problem is to be handled under the conditions that are now emerging. The idea that coercion and violence only enter society and history as a result of the malfunctioning of the productive process, that they will spontaneously disappear once that malfunction has been corrected, that there is no need to devise or maintain institutional barriers against them, is false and dangerous. What we need to think about most is precisely something—the determining role of power relations in social systems—systematically obscured by the Marxist vision, though not by the real history of societies reconstructed under the banner of Marxism.

ERNEST GELLNER

Ernest Gellner is the author of *Nations and Nationalism* (Cornell University Press), among other books.

ANGSTPOLITIK

Germany Today: A Personal Report by Walter Laqueur

(Little, Brown, 231 pp., $16.95)

One of the paradoxes of the West German cultural scene is that the most pessimistic of the Federal Republic's writers is also one of the most successful. Ever since the production of his play *Gross und Klein* (1978), with its repeatedly posed question "*Wohin?*" ("What's it all about?"), and its implied motto "Instead of war, we have this!" Botho Strauss has been questioning the durability of the *Bundesrepublik*. In his book of essays *Paare Passanten*, published in 1982, he expressed doubt whether a liberal democracy could in the long run satisfy the basic desires of the German people, adding that

> We are, in any case, running out of time. We should accept the fact that, much more quickly than in the last thirty years, the future will bring abrupt occurrences in which the repressed currents may gather and erupt and the security fuses of modern rationalism burn out quickly because their capacity is overcharged.

In his hit play of last season, *Der Park*, which was based loosely on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Strauss described a visit to the Federal Republic by Oberon and Titania in an attempt to reawaken passion in the citizens of an atomized, dejected, and apparently futureless society, and the utter failure of this mission. In one of the disjointed and pointless conversations that fill this curious work, a character suddenly shouts, with apparent enthusiasm, "*Wir werden noch unser blaues Wunder erleben!*" ("We're in for a big surprise!"), as if to intimate that the apocalypse is on the way.

None of this seems to square with what we know about the real Federal Republic of Germany, a stable and efficient democracy and one of the most prosperous in Western Europe, whose citizens, as the polls show, appear in the great majority to be happy with the existing state of affairs. One might suppose that they would resent or find ludicrous the gloomy picture of their condition that Botho Strauss makes a practice of broadcasting. But, on the contrary, they buy his books in large numbers, and *Der Park* plays to overcrowded houses. Why?

In his interesting new analysis of West German society, Walter Laqueur makes no mention of Strauss, but he does address the problem posed by the apparently enthusiastic reception of works that are so heavily laden with cultural pessimism. There is no doubt in Laqueur's mind that, beneath the surface of well-being and the apparent acceptance of the status quo, there is a general feeling of insecurity in West Germany. This, he argues, is partly the result of historical experience and the political and psychological legacy of the Third Reich, and partly a manifestation of the German temperament, with its proneness to perfectionism and metaphysical speculation.

Mr. Laqueur reminds us that the Germans have always suffered from a congenital inability to be content with what they have. Heinrich Heine once wondered how foreigners could ever possibly understand "the emotional constitution of a people that has only a Yesterday and a Tomorrow but no Today, which perpetually thinks about the past and perpetually makes surmises about the future but never has a notion about how to grasp the present, either in love or in politics." Mr. Laqueur puts it somewhat differently, although the sense is much the same. "There seems," he writes,

> to be an inclination to expect the worst among these unquiet people. They have always found it difficult to enjoy life: they have acted as pioneers in many directions but never in the field of *savoir vivre*. Being perfectionists, their achievements seldom match their expectations; if they do not score a complete success, they are quick to assume utter failure.

MOREOVER, even when things are going well in the world of politics and economic affairs, Germans find it difficult to relax and maintain perspective, for they tend to "suffer more from abstract and metaphysical pains than other less philosophically minded nations." They worry about the cultural crisis besetting European civilization (which has been around too long to concern the sensible French and Italians). They worry about their identity, about where they came from and what their ultimate destiny will be. "They are still great lovers of the absolute," and since they are doomed to live in an imperfect world, they feel insecure and unhappy about it.

Much of this is doubtless true. One might add that, considering the deterioration of relations between the super-

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powers over the past five years, and the feeling of the Germans—who will be in the eye of any storm that breaks out in Europe—that they are powerless to influence the behavior of their greater allies, it is understandable that the more reflective among them should feel that their existence is at best a tentative one. Still, Mr. Laqueur seems less interested in that circumstance than he is concerned about two other tendencies in German life: first, the historical tendency toward what he calls "exaggeration and excess, a relentlessness, a desire to pursue things to their (allegedly) logical end rather than to stop and reflect," a tendency that he finds particularly strong in the younger generation, the student movement, and the Greens; and second, the excessive influence of German intellectuals in German society.

THERE IS a good deal about intellectuals in Mr. Laqueur's book, and little of it is complimentary. He feels that on the whole the critiques of contemporary society that have come from the pens of writers like Böll and Walser and Grass have been characterized by negativism and parochialism, rarely informed by comparisons of postwar German society with that of the Third Reich, or the Weimar Republic, or the Wilhelmine age, or other European societies. In his general survey of the cultural scene in West Germany since 1945, and particularly since the 1960s, his view of the New German Cinema verges on the contemptuous. ("The Young German Film knew neither real comedy nor real tragedy, only grotesque grimaces at the margins of society, Caligari and Nosferatu rehashed on a lower level of intellectual sophistication.")

He sees German historiography as dominated by purveyors of *Faschismustheorie* who trivialize Nazism, and by cold war revisionists who lay the blame for all international tension since 1945 at the door of the West. He attacks radical Protestantism for "confusing political thoughts and moral postulates" and thus perhaps making war more, rather than less, likely. He expresses concern about the fact that the influence of left-wing intellectuals, "through television, newspapers, periodicals and publishing houses and, generally speaking, as disseminators of ideas, as the makers of public opinion . . . has been out of proportion to their numbers." He is doubtless thinking of such opinion-makers when he writes that the anxieties of the younger generation "have been reinforced by preachers of fear."

With all deference to Mr. Laqueur's deep knowledge of Germany, one cannot help but feel that much of this is exaggerated. If he had paid closer attention to current tendencies in German historical literature, and particularly to the work of the new generation of narrative and political history represented by such historians as Thomas Nipperdey, Michael Stürmer, Hagen Schulze, and Johannes Willms, he might have been less impressed by the results of what he calls "Leninist" historiography. Similarly, his strictures on Protestant churchmen's attitudes toward foreign policy might properly have been balanced by some reference to the 12 Evangelical Academies, conference centers supported by the Evangelical Church. They have exerted a very positive influence on national opinion by providing opportunities for the discussion of salient foreign and domestic policy issues by representatives of diverse views drawn from the federal and *Länder* governments, the political parties, the armed services, the universities, religious denominations, industry, and labor. No one who attended the International Conference on East-West Relations at the Evangelical Academy at Loccum last October would claim that

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all of the views expressed there by representatives of the churches were either naive or tendentious.

Mr. Laqueur himself seems to feel called upon to temper his attack on the intellectuals as his account proceeds. He recalls that in the past too many of Germany's *Dichter und Denker* either heaped excessive praise upon their rulers or withdrew into an aestheticism that was bereft of any sense of public responsibility. In comparison with that attitude and its consequences, he writes, "there is much to be said for present-day political involvement." There is indeed, but after everything that has gone before this admission is a bit lame.

AFTER his discussion of the "unhappy intellectuals," which may be described as the central chapter of this book, Mr. Laqueur provides us with a provocative chapter on the new German patriotism, a solid and rewarding discussion of economic tendencies and prospects in the *Bundesrepublik*, and a final chapter that has some perceptive things to say about the present state of the parties and about the Federal Republic's relationship with NATO.

In the first of these Mr. Laqueur dissociates the new patriotism from the radical nationalism of the past and shows how little substance there is to the perennial fears of a return by the Germans to what a recent French writer called their "familiar demons." The discussion of the German identity, of which we have heard so much in the past three years, and the revival of *Heimat* as a symbol and a movement should be identified, he feels, with a new German interest in belonging. Here he appears to agree with the German political scientist Iring Fetscher, who wrote not so long ago:

> After decades of maximal distance from Germany, which found expression among some people in socialist internationalism and among others in cosmopolitan consumerism, the need, the wish to be 'one's self,' to be something specific in a national sense, is alive again.

Mr. Laqueur is inclined to regard as almost adventitious the anti-Americanism that accompanies some expressions of this new feeling, the result of the insider's subconscious desire to strike out at the threatening outsider and of the feeling that, "since we cannot afford to criticize the Russians, we ought to concentrate on the crimes of American imperialism." There is perhaps something in this, but one sometimes feels that there might be a little less anti-Americanism in Germany and in Europe in general if American official statements of policy did not so often seem to confirm the most exaggerated interpretations of our motives.

That relations between the Federal Republic and the United States are no longer as untroubled as they were in the heyday of Konrad Adenauer and John Foster Dulles has been all too obvious of late, and Mr. Laqueur quite rightly shows that much of the strain has been caused by latent conflict between West Germany's *Ostpolitik* and its obligations to NATO. It is probably true that most of the anti-NATO rhetoric that one hears in West Germany these days need not be taken seriously. Yet it is clear enough that there is much concerned discussion in the press, the Evangelical Academies, and elsewhere of the possibility of alternative policies that might give the Bonn government more *Spielraum*, or freedom of maneuver, in international affairs, particularly at a time when confidence in the wisdom of the superpowers is at a low ebb.

Mr. Laqueur sees only three possible strategies of foreign affairs available for the West Germans: to stay in the NATO alliance; to work for a new defense community in which the European states would assume major, if not total, responsibility for their own defense; or to seek German neutralization. Since the second solution would be difficult to accomplish and expensive—perhaps intolerably so—to maintain, and since the third solution is replete with dangers to political liberty, the NATO connection is still clearly the choice of most West Germans. But there is no doubt that German criticism of NATO's strategy and its consultative procedures is increasing, and this is matched by growing American unhappiness over what is regarded as foot-dragging and nagging. Mr. Laqueur seems to feel that "neutralism in Europe may get its opportunity at some future date, not as a result of a decision to leave the Alliance, but because America may lose patience with its reluctant allies." Since, however, the Germans have been the most reliable of those allies and, in the building up of the NATO battle line, the most efficient, it is to be hoped that, if that question is ever posed, it will be decided more on the basis of national interest rather than because Washington is irritated that the Germans are not always willing to evince a proper Nibelungen loyalty.

GORDON A. CRAIG

Gordon A. Craig is the J. E. Wallace Sterling Professor of Humanities Emeritus at Stanford University.

POSTMARK PARNASSUS

Letters, Summer 1926: Pasternak, Tsvetayeva, Rilke
edited by Yevgeny Pasternak, Yelena Pasternak, and Konstantin M. Azadovsky
translated by Margaret Wettlin and Walter Arndt

(Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 251 pp., $24.95)

Readers should beware of a natural first reaction: Well, of course they were three of the greatest poets of this century, but . . . a mere handful of letters from one summer? Might one not wait for something more substantial? Don't wait. These letters are like those Japanese paper flowers that require only a little water to expand and unfold into gorgeous or fantastical shapes. Like most good modern fiction, they require the collaboration of the reader, their belated but privileged perlustrator. Watered with his attention, his aptness to take hints and apprehend what is meant, however unconsciously, be-

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neath what is written, these strange texts blossom into a veritable novella. It seems at times to have mythical dimensions, with a god (Rilke), a pythoness (Tsvetaeva—whose name is normally spelled thus), and a blameless, doomed mortal (Pasternak).

There is no balance whatsoever in the correspondence. Pasternak wrote one letter to Rilke (though the editors very unhelpfully suggest by such phrases as "in *a* letter to Rilke" that there are several) and Rilke one to Pasternak. Everything else belongs to Marina Tsvetaeva. Nor is "belongs" too strong a word. There are about 50 letters in all (impossible to count them exactly, since the editors quote from letters merely presumed to have been sent and reconstituted on the best available evidence, such as drafts and secondhand accounts), and of these the overwhelming majority are from or to Tsvetaeva, or pass through her hands. Not only was she the author or recipient of most of the letters—she was also the post office, and where Pasternak was concerned she was in that role maddeningly, haphazardly, bitchily slow. Rilke is the spiritual center, but it is Marina's book.

THE INITIAL situation was this. Rilke had never recovered from the impression made on him by two visits to Russia in 1899 and 1900: the "homeland of my instinctual being" he called it, the "decisive event" in his life. (Tsvetaeva felt exactly the same about Germany.) He learned the language well enough to write a few poems in it and even to read the prose of Goncharov. Writing technically correct verse in Russian is all too easy (it is one of the national pastimes), but reading Goncharov is no cinch.

One of the people who facilitated his encounter with Russia was the painter Leonid Pasternak, the father of Boris, who, by one of the unspeakable ironies of fate, met at the age of ten the poet whom he would practically have died to meet a quarter of a century later. After the Revolution Rilke's path again happened to cross that of Leonid, who was by then living with most of his family in Berlin. This opened the way for Pasternak's father to write a warm letter in 1925 congratulating Rilke, now world-famous, on his 50th birthday.

Rilke's very cordial reply contained the explosive intelligence that he not only knew of Boris Pasternak's poetry but had read it with admiration: "the youthful fame of your son Boris touched me from more than one side." Every syllable relating to himself in this letter had an effect upon Pasternak that can scarcely be described (a god had caressed him), but it was agonizing weeks before Pasternak, in distant Moscow, could see them for himself.

That fact takes us from the initial situation of this correspondence to its permanent condition: Pasternak's isolation in the USSR from those in the West (his own family and Tsvetaeva) whose laziness or indifference or selfish guile delayed or prevented or distorted his contact with the one person on earth whom he needed most—Rainer Maria Rilke.

AFTER frenzies of anticipation, while his scattered relatives in Europe passed around and savored the words that he was frantically awaiting, Pasternak pried loose from his father Rilke's actual letter. At about the same time he came across a new work of Marina Tsvetaeva, one of her greatest, the "Poem of the End." In the mind of Pasternak, utterly convinced that fate routinely directed his life, this fatidic conjunction sealed forever the linkage of himself with Rilke and Tsvetaeva. He wrote her an impassioned letter (using the familiar pronoun as though they were intimate acquaintances) and shortly thereafter found the courage to write to Rilke, then in Switzerland.

Switzerland and the USSR having at the time no postal relations, the letter had to go to his father for forwarding. Leonid read it, said that of course he would send it along, but first he thought that Boris's sister Josephine in Munich might enjoy reading it, and in the meantime he chided the 36-year-old Pasternak for a supposed lapse of etiquette that he detected in one passage. When the letter, probably as crucial a text in his own estimation as he had ever written, had wandered through the leisurely inspection of his family, it eventually reached Rilke. It had been under way from April 12 to May 3. Rilke wrote his reply within an hour of receiving it. His answer was addressed to a person in Paris of whom he had never heard, one Marina Tsvetaeva.

The reason for that is this. In an infinitely Russian gesture of abnegation to which Rilke must have been attuned, Pasternak had given Marina the gift of Rilke. He was not worthy of an answer. It would be a sufficient signal of response if Rilke would simply send, say, the *Duino Elegies*, known to Pasternak only by hearsay, to the "Poet Tsvetaeva."

From this point the letters compose a sort of tragicomedy. Each of these poets was more than capable of the "lofty inarticulancy" prized among Symbolist circles as a warrant of authenticity, and one must not blame the translators for a good deal of ethereal twittering with no assignable significance. But it is clear that Tsvetaeva could scarcely believe her good luck. She smothered Rilke with replies and desired nothing so much as to be his *only* correspondent, excluding not only Pasternak but also everyone else.

Rilke was dying. When he could no longer conceal the fact from himself he made a few oblique attempts to apprise Marina of the situation. To these hints she was totally deaf (her letters in any case never seem addressed to any flesh-and-blood recipient but are merely fragments of her continual meditation upon herself). Rilke's mention that a young woman (and a Russian at that) had come to serve as his secretary finally brought Marina's attention down to earth. Dropping all reticence, she frankly offered herself to him. An embarrassed si-

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lence ensued, after which Rilke died.

There is some evidence that, just before he succumbed, Rilke understood what was going on: "That Boris is keeping silent concerns and distresses me . . . I still find you stern, almost harsh toward him. . . ." Rilke's body had hardly cooled before Marina had reconsidered her dismissal of Boris. Now she invited him:

> You will come to me and we will go together to London. Build your plans on London—on London, I tell you; I have long believed in London. Never before have I sent for you: now the time has come. We will be alone in that enormous London. Your town and mine.

To the dead Rilke they both wrote a few more letters, and, after the exhausting intensity of the summer of 1926, they wrote in kindly fashion to each other. For the full correspondence one must wait until the next century.

CLARENCE BROWN

Clarence Brown, who teaches Russian and comparative literature at Princeton, is the author of *Mandelstam* (Cambridge University Press), among other books.

THE WIZ

Merger Mania
by Ivan F. Boesky

(Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 242 pp., $18.95)

Common sense tells us that anyone who makes fortunes in the stock market wouldn't reveal his trade secrets for $18.95. Once compromised, a proprietary investment strategy offers little guidance to tomorrow's stock prices, for its mass application drives up prices instantaneously, leaving few bargains behind.

No one knows this ironclad law of the discount better than Ivan Boesky, one of Wall Street's most inscrutable arbitrageurs. As a risk arbitrageur, Boesky purchases securities of a company that is being taken over, hoping to exchange them for a gain when the deal is complete. Boesky makes his money by spotting disparities in values of those to-be-acquired stocks and investing heavily in those he believes will go up the most.

If your newspaper's business section eludes you, and you haven't owned shares of CBS, or the late, departed Gulf, Cities Service, or Getty, you may not recognize Boesky's name. Don't feel ashamed. Despite his unwelcome investments of hundreds of millions of dollars in each of these hunted companies, he's remained invisible, disguising his strategies to brokers and to the press. As recently as six months ago, the "Nightly Business Report," our national daily financial program, routinely mispronounced his name to rhyme with Pesky. (It sounds like the Boe in Boeing.) But after years of toiling anonymously in stock-table backwaters, Boesky has of late moved to financial page one. Credit the newfound visibility to his evolution from massive-but-passive investor in mega oil deals to overt aggressor in the pursuit of CBS.

So naturally, when a book comes out that purports to "tell you everything except what Ivan's buying," anybody who has followed the quiet transformation from small-time arb to one of the richest men in America must be intrigued. As a broker, always in search of the "best-kept money-making secrets," as Boesky describes risk arbitrage, I couldn't wait to devour *Merger Mania*. But behind the ad campaign and a title that sounds like a real bare-all, we get a far different insight. *Merger Mania* is an ode to the technical precision of risk arbitrage. In page after page of charts and lecture-like text, Boesky gives us the methodical nuts and bolts of how to invest in mergers and acquisitions. In great detail we get the rudiments of capturing the "spread," or locking in the difference between the announced price of a deal and the lower, market price of the to-be-acquired company immediately after the deal is announced.

Boesky crisply rattles off everything a beginner must know about how classic risk arbitrage works, and his knowledge of the field shines on every page. His mastery of the nuance of each merger he dissects is extraordinarily precise and compelling, sometimes making the book read like a mystery or adventure story. At the same time the text is so thorough, particularly the business law and corporate tax chapters, that at times this law school graduate lamented the fact that Boesky hadn't published before those grueling exams. Indeed, *Merger Mania* is the first truly digestible theoretical work on this arcane subject, supplanting *Risk Arbitrage II*, the classic but too-technical handbook by Guy P. Wyser-Pratte.

Laced through *Merger Mania* is Boesky's assertion that risk arbitrage involves little wagering, and certainly much less risk than pure stock-picking. Risk arbitrage, he writes, "is not gambling in any sense. Done properly, the odds of a risk arbitrage investment are with you, not against you." As he describes risk arbitrage—earning money patiently, in tiny increments, a half-point here and one-and-five-eighths points there—indeed there is very little gambling.

But there are two problems with Boesky's theoretical approach. First, you can't make very much money these days applying it. Second, it isn't how Ivan Boesky made his fortune.

As a broker, every day between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. I get to witness theory going awry. At first reading I was eager to try to put *Merger Mania* to work on the big announced deals currently available. But in practice almost every announced merger—net after brokerage commissions, short-term capital gains taxes, and the spread between the bid and offered side of the market—produced a pitiful return on capital. A search of the large buy-outs of the past year yielded pretty much the same conclusion. As soon as these deals occurred, the differences between the market and final prices had narrowed to the point of unprofitability for all except those who paid no commissions, typically the brokerage firms for their own accounts.

There were some exceptions. First, in several takeovers the acquiring company's bid was so shaky that the market failed to react to it. For example, Ted Turner's current $175-face-amount bid for CBS hasn't kept that stock from languishing in the low 100s for many weeks. Second, out of nowhere, a bet-

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ter offer can come along, as in the case of Conoco, when DuPont's bid topped Seagram's to "save" the oil giant from the Canadians and make more money for the arbs. To step into the former requires the instincts not of an academician but of a gambler. To invest in the latter calls for intuition, information, and a crystal ball—again the traits of a wagerer with an educated view of the odds, not those of a methodical scholar.

THESE two situations are precisely the instances that Boesky exploits best in real life. Yet *Merger Mania* gives us little of the subjective insight he brings to bear on either. It's terrific on the math of a complicated deal, but devoid of the management, institutions, and speculators who make up the rest of the equation. We need not ask for his critical ratings of the players involved. A quick gloss on Boesky's mind when a fresh bid hits the tape, or when he senses that one will, would have done fine.

Sadly, it's Boesky's insistence that there is no wagering in risk arbitrage that robs us of the unique element he brings to the investment community. Many other arbitrageurs make the same calculations as Boesky. As witnessed by the decreasing spreads in takeovers, plenty of people are already doing exactly what Boesky describes in *Merger Mania*.

But one thing they don't do is plunge, that is commit the works to an arbitrage investment after the calculation is made. As any arbitrageur will tell you, that's Boesky's hallmark. Once convinced, Boesky bets the house, and he does so with much less hesitation than we might show in picking out a magazine or a pack of gum to buy. Ultimately, what makes Boesky fascinating is his least theoretical quality: his guts. Just one example suffices. Many arbs, including Boesky, figured that Gulf would purchase Cities Service in 1982. But because of possible opposition by the FTC, most wagered only a small percentage of their assets, computing that the reward would not be worth the risk. Not Boesky. While his company's figures are private, he was understood to have invested without restraint. When Gulf balked, Boesky got crushed. However, he came back fast, with apparently little lasting damage to his style of play or to his partner's fortunes.

It's for a description of how to get back into the game—indeed, how to get up in the morning—after a Cities Service fiasco that we need a book by Boesky. If Boesky is to take his place in the pantheon of great speculators along with Jesse Livermore and Bernard Baruch, it won't be because he tried to squeeze a point or two on a deal's fat spread after some present-value analysis—an MBA with a calculator could do that. Boesky's legend will live because he spotted the Gettys, CBSs, and Gulfs early and he wagered it all.

JAMES J. CRAMER

James J. Cramer is an associate in the securities sales department of Goldman Sachs & Co.

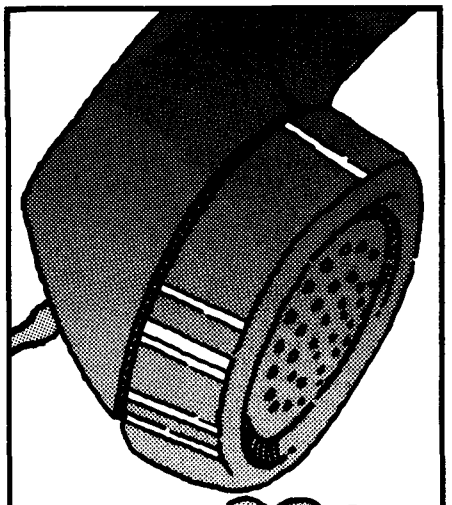
CORRESPONDENCE, *from page 2*

ile. At its Third National Congress last January, which was attended by representatives of the Socialist International, the PSD recognized "the significant steps that have been taken to achieve a peaceful and democratic solution," and strongly rejected "violent forms of political struggle with their implications of intolerance and authoritarianism."

The government has also decided to appoint civilians to all public administration posts held by military personnel, including the police corps. These changes have been taking place since June 1, 1985.

Nevertheless, the author insists that elections in Guatemala "are a cruel joke" and that "the [Reagan] administration knows that the most that can be reasonably hoped for in Guatemala is a pretense of democratization." He used the same argument regarding El Salvador in an article for *Foreign Affairs*, summer 1983. Today there is an emerging consensus in Congress and in the administration that the efforts being made to support democracy in El Salvador are succeeding. Furthermore, as recognized by the editorial in TNR "Good News from El Salvador"(June 10), these efforts are being supported by the Salvadoran military. In Latin America, a centrist solution is a real possibility, as suggested in the editorial: "Now there is Raúl Alfonsín in Argentina, and Duarte in El Salvador, centrists both, anticommunists who insist on social justice as well as geopolitical strength."

EDUARDO PALOMO
Ambassador of Guatemala
Washington, D.C.



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Piero Gleijeses replies:
A July 28 *New York Times* article ("New Army Slayings in Guatemala Reported by Villagers and the Church") quoting Guatemala's Archbishop Prospero Penados provides an answer to Ambassador Palomo's letter. "The army kills many people up to children," Penados is quoted as saying, and "repression is strong enough to keep the Church from organizing a Human Rights Commission because people are afraid to serve on it." The rising wave of army killings, the open wounds of the 1980-83 army massacres, and the oppressive system of Civil Defense Patrols introduced by the army since 1982 provide the background for the "very dynamic and lively" political debate praised by Ambassador Palomo. They explain why not one of the presidential candidates talks of social reforms in a country with staggering social inequalities.

In quoting the March 1985 U.N. resolution, Ambassador Palomo forgets to note that it "expresses once more its deep concern at the continuing serious and systematic violations of human rights in Guatemala. . . . [It] further expresses its profound concern at restrictive measures which limit the freedom of rural and indigenous populations, notably their . . . forced participation in civilian patrols organized and controlled by the armed forces," etc. Lord Colville's 1984 report is a lonely exception among the otherwise devastating reports by international human rights organizations, church sources, and others. More instructive than the faint praise by the handful of social democratic leaders is their silence on controversial issues.

Ambassador Palomo refers to the case of El Salvador. Whatever human rights improvements may have occurred there since 1983, they have taken place under very heavy pressure from the U.S. Congress and administration. The Salvadoran military is extremely dependent on the U.S. for its survival. In Guatemala, by contrast, the armed forces, as they proudly note, are the masters in their own house. The relinquishment of political offices to powerless civilians is as effective as a new coat of paint on a rotting house.

Work Won't Work

To the editors:
In "The Triumph of Asian-Americans" (July 15&22), David Bell distorts history in a way that leads him implicitly to denigrate ethnic groups other than Asians and Jews, the model economic "success stories" of American history. By attributing Asian and Jewish success partly to their having "fully understood the importance of the universities," he implies that other groups, presumably including blacks, have not had such a full understanding. This is nonsense. Everything from Reconstruction-era enrollment figures to the NAACP campaign against segregated higher education to today's struggles over college admissions shows that the black public and black leaders have placed an extremely high value on education at all levels for over a hundred years.

Second, by accepting Thomas Sowell's controversial analysis of ethnic economic success, Bell suggests that Jewish economic success "inexorably" came from skills, education, and a decline in discrimination, and that groups which emphasize political action are foolish. It is nice to think that in order to succeed groups merely have to work hard and wait for discrimination to end, but history shows otherwise. Jewish entry into the middle class depended heavily upon political action. I wonder where blacks would be today had they decided not to march on Selma and Birmingham, but rather resolved to work hard and wait for discrimination to go away.

PAUL BURSTEIN
Vanderbilt University
Nashville, Tennessee

Common Causes

To the editors:
I was amazed to read your assertion (Notebook, August 5) that women around the world have, in effect, no common concerns that might be addressed at a worldwide conference. It would seem obvious that women share any number of problems (reproduction, child care, unpaid housework, abuse, etc.).

Does anyone question worldwide conferences on unionism? Should Jews who live on Park Avenue feel no special commonality with the Jews of Ethiopia?

I have no desire to defend this particular conference, about which I know little. It does seem, however, ridiculous to pretend that women have no shared concerns. (Is rape only a problem where you live?) To make this assumption is to ignore numerous biological and sociological facts of life.

ERIC PELLARIN
St. Louis, Missouri

TRB, *from page 4*

come to grips with the 'new mercantilism' that dominates the world trading system." But why? If the Japanese are maniacally obsessed with accumulating dollars forever, as the mercantilist European nations of the 18th century were maniacally obsessed with accumulating gold, that is their mistake. We only benefit.

Now that's a bit oversimplified. The healthiest trade situation for any country is to have neither a deficit nor a surplus. Among other problems, these wild trade imbalances are destabilizing. The current flood of imports is flattening industries that we will need when the dollar weakens and trade flows reverse themselves. Furthermore, when and if the Japanese decide to spend their hoard, we will find ourselves working to supply them with goods and services and getting nothing in return except our own tattered dollars. It won't be pleasant.

But note the irony. If that unpleasant day ever arrives, *we* will be running a trade surplus and *they* will be running a deficit. That is, America will be in precisely the position the Japanese are in today—a position we accuse them of achieving as part of some devious mercantilist plot.

The Democrats won a closely watched special election for a House seat in east Texas last month, relying heavily on the protectionist theme. Now politicians of both parties are fanning the flames. A few, who know they ought to be ashamed of themselves, are playing "bad cop/good cop." I support mild protectionism, they say, to prevent the mobs from demanding something worse. Among leading pols, only Democrat Gary Hart and Republican Jack Kemp have forthrightly opposed protectionist legislation.

But the politicians have got it all wrong. The danger in our trade deficit with Japan is not what's happening now, but what will happen when it ends. Clearly, then, if we're determined to "get tough" with the Japanese on trade issues, we should do precisely the reverse of what everybody is suggesting. Instead of demanding that they change their habits at once, we should demand that they pursue their "mercantilist" policy indefinitely. Let's make them send us $40 billion worth of free automobiles, cameras, and VCRs year in and year out, until they cry uncle.

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

God and Country

THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION is hitting its stride as the administration's primary pulpit for social philosophy—kind of a ministry of metaphysics, with William J. Bennett the minister. Last week Bennett pronounced upon the relationship between democracy and religion. "And that relationship is this: our values as a free people and the central values of the Judeo-Christian tradition are flesh of the flesh and blood of the blood." He preached against "a new aversion to religion," against "the attitude that regards entanglement with religion as something akin to entanglement with an infectious disease." The secretary of education could do with some of same—a refresher, perhaps, in a few of those great books he's been shilling for. There he will find—in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, for example, or the *Two Treatises of Government*—the fine refutation of his voguish views. He will discover, for a start, that democracy developed precisely as a form of divorce from religion. The grim reality was that the record of religion in the matter of tolerance was not exactly brilliant. It was, to paraphrase Bennett, flesh of the heretic's flesh and blood of the Jew's blood. (Bennett's phrase about "the Judeo-Christian tradition" is affecting. Unfortunately, there is no such tradition; and, more to the point, it is a "Christian nation," not a "Judeo-Christian nation," that America becomes in the politics of the pious.) No need for alarm, though. Godless communism is not all that remains. History tells that liberalism was not based on "an aversion to religion," merely on an aversion to religion in the public realm. The private realm could be comfortably consecrated to the sacred. Indeed, the expulsion of religion from power was accomplished by thinkers in full mind of heaven. There never lived a democrat who loved God more than Spinoza. And Jefferson was not far behind. Nothing could more flagrantly differ from the absolutist character of faith, however, than the pluralistic polity that Jefferson devised. For the individual, there may be only one truth; for the state, there must be only many truths. Otherwise we risk Khomeinism and Kahaneism. Bennett's notion that liberalism's vigilance about religion is spiritually impoverishing is his problem, not liberalism's. There is no contradiction between keeping the society open and closing (that is, healing) one's own mind. That is the American Revolution in the history of religion.

THE POLITICAL OBJECTION to the new religious politics is common enough. But where is the religious objection? Where are the priests and the rabbis to warn not that religion is damaging politics but that politics is damaging religion? For we are witnessing not merely the return of religion but the distraction of religion. Where there was silence, there is now noise; where there was contemplation, there is now agitation; where there was dread, there is now ambition; where there was serenity, there is now strategy. I exaggerate, of course; nor is there anything inappropriate about a religious involvement with the world. And yet it is indisputable that the emotional and cultural climate in the religious world—Christian, Jewish, and Moslem, right, left, and center—has undergone an inflammation. Too much energy now seems institutional and organizational, aroused by the prospect of new associations with power, of new avenues of influence. The public square is not, as John Neuhaus fears it is, naked; in fact, it has become gaudy with God's pols and has invaded the private square, where it is interfering with the business of interiority. Banishing religion from the public square was good for the square, which was relieved of the fagots and the freethinkers that had been carried there for centuries, but it was also good for religion. It left the believing individual and the believing community to collect themselves. That is difficult in the current commotion; the political wind, the social earthquake, the technological fire have overwhelmed the still small voice.

AS THE BREAKDOWN of Reaganism proceeds, not all its intellectuals are digging bigger holes for themselves, like Bennett. Some appear to be slyly revising themselves. Among the most stunning signs that the *Geist* is running out of *Zeit* was an Op-Ed piece by Michael Novak and Leslie Lenkowsky of the American Enterprise Institute that appeared in *The New York Times* on July 2. It was wisely called "Economic Growth Won't End Poverty." The authors insisted that "something important has gone unnoticed" in recent years: that "a large proportion of today's poor are people whom economic changes help little or not at all. . . . A 'rising tide' will no longer 'lift all boats,' as we learned to expect in the 1960s. . . . Clearly economic growth alone is no longer enough." Golden words, all of them; and all of them premised on a failure of the reader's memory. It was only last fall that the argument for a social policy based on growth was being made by none other than Novak; it was he for whom the destitute in the margins of the market went "unnoticed," he who perfectly captured the spirit of the rising tide in his Lay Letter. (No, Novak did not call for the undoing of all of the welfare state; but he deludes himself if he thinks that he appeared as its friend.) Moreover, the rising tide is precisely the opposite of what the 1960s taught; its time came, after all, on January 20, 1981. Novak's outbreak of *dirigisme* sets a recent record; it took Jonathan Schell almost two years to switch from unilateral disarmament to Star Wars. At least Novak is moving in a defensible direction. But next time, please, a little irony.

BETTER "USA! USA!" than "Amerika," but the ubiquity of the American flag is becoming tiresome. These days everything must be garnished by a love of country. Thus the Pointer Sisters tell reporters that they are "sexy in an American, Christian way," when being sexy in a sexy way is achievement enough. And thus my heart sank at the sight of the stage at RFK Stadium last week, which was set for Bruce Springsteen. There, as the backdrop, was the largest American flag I have ever seen. Now, I too love my country, as I love my family; but I don't take my family everywhere. Springsteen appeared and sang "Born in the USA," or rather, 55,000 people sang it to the accompaniment of his band. And then, in the most mature expression of American patriotism that Washingtonians have witnessed in a long time, the flag was dropped. Good for Bruce. Tribute had been properly paid; it was time for a wholly other happiness.

L.W.

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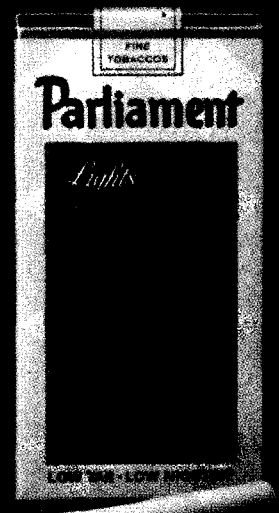

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